

untitled richard pryor

by
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EXT. HOUSE - ENCINO, CA - 2005 - DAY

To establish. A modest ranch-style home in the hills.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bright, clean and comfortable. Myriad PHOTOS ON THE WALLS of a young, vibrant RICHARD PRYOR, in his 20s and 30s, posing with celebrities, on stage, on movie sets, etc.

IMAGES OF THE PASSION & EXCITEMENT OF A BIG LIFE THAT WAS.

A COMEDY DVD plays in the background -- the sound of a young, CURRENT AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMEDIAN skewering social mores, punctuated by loud AUDIENCE LAUGHTER.

On a small TABLE, a stack of DVDs. All STAND-UP -- Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, etc. -- the COMICS of the day -- the "sons" of Richard.

CUT TO:

A MAN IN A WHEELCHAIR

RICHARD PRYOR, age 65, body ravaged by the cruelties of multiple sclerosis. A limp, frail, gnarled shell of his former self.

It's a shockingly stark contrast to the photos and an altogether devastating sight.

CARMEN, his NURSE, 40s, frequently wipes spittle from his crooked mouth, as his wide, unblinking eyes watch the young Comic on T.V.

ONSCREEN, the AUDIENCE laughs as one, and Richard's head whips back, eyes going wide, mouth twitching open soundlessly. Could be laughter. Could be a spasm.

Richard's eyes subtly react to the sound of a CAR pulling into the driveway just outside the window. Despite his state, there's still a visible intelligence at work within.

Suddenly the front door opens. His wife JENNIFER LEE -- white, 50s, brash and full of life -- bursts in.

JENNIFER

(calling)

I'm home. Hi Richard.

She enters the living room, comes around the front of the wheelchair, facing him. Takes the rag from the nurse and lovingly dabs the corners of his mouth.

JENNIFER

Did you go outside today?

NURSE

Yes. He did.

JENNIFER

What're you watching?

(re: Stand-up Comic)

Look at him. Doin' shit you were
doin' 30 years ago. These
motherfuckers ain't never be more
than a pale imitation of the king,
right?

His head whips back, mouth drops open in silent reply.

JENNIFER

Right, Richard? You like that.

She leans in close. Kisses him tenderly, pulls back and
stares at him through misting eyes..

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Jennifer sniffles quietly into the phone, trying to keep it
together as a calm FEMALE VOICE emanates from the other end.
She peaks at Richard in the living room through a partition.

JENNIFER

No, he looks good. He's gotten a
lot of his color back.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

That's good.

JENNIFER

I try to keep everything positive
for him, but it's hard. I know he
gets depressed.

(breaking down)

Hardly anyone comes to visit
anymore. Sometimes I feel like...
like I'm all alone in this.

FEMALE VOICE

What about Richard? Does he talk
to you? Can he?

JENNIFER

It's too hard for him. Nothing ever comes out right anymore, and I know him, he's too proud.

She stares out at him through the partition.

JENNIFER

He's still Richard. Even now I can tell just by looking in his eyes...

CLOSE ON RICHARD as he watches the YOUNG, EAGER BLACK STAND-UP do his thing.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

... there's still so much going on in there.

Moving DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO HIS EYES, it's clear... there is a lot going on in there.

A lifetime.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE APARTMENT - 1965 - DAY

TIGHT on a T.V SCREEN. LBJ addresses a college audience. GREAT SOCIETY SPEECH. Close by, a PHONE RINGS.

LBJ

We have the power to shape the civilization that we want. But we need your will, your labor, your hearts, if we are to build that kind of society...

PULLING AWAY from the T.V we glide over empty LIQUOR BOTTLES - - ASHTRAYS filled to the brim with cigarettes -- scattered MOUNDS OF POT next to ROLLING PAPERS -- CLOTHES strewn about.

On a night-stand, a clock reads 6:34. PAN to a BED where two half-naked, young WHITE WOMEN, 20s, lay next to a half naked young BLACK MAN whose face we don't see.

The PHONE on the night-stand rings, incessantly. The YOUNG MAN stirs, reaches over, pulls the receiver off the hook.

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

(painfully into phone)

... who'sis... ?

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - SAME

The halls are bustling with the activities of a LIVE NETWORK SHOW GETTING READY FOR AIR. SANDY, white, 30s, whisper-screams into a payphone. INTERCUT.

SANDY

Where the fuck are you? I been calling for half an hour.

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE

Not so loud, man.

SANDY

I covered you for blocking, but if you're not here in the next forty-five minutes...

Notices people are watching him. Composes himself.

SANDY

You got a reputation as it is, kid. If it gets out you missed another Sullivan, you're finished. Nobody in their right mind's gonna wanna book you. Now, you can either get your ass in a cab or on a plane, 'cause if you ain't up here, dressed and ready to go within the hour, you may as well catch the next flight back to Peoria.

QUICK CUTS. A BOTTLE OF ASPIRIN popped open, a couple pills popped in a mouth with water. An arm reaches in to a CLOSET, takes out a SUIT ON A WIRE HANGER.

EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE STREET - SAME

A BLACK ARM is extended. One ON-DUTY TAXI after another passes without stopping. The Black Arm goes down and a WHITE ARM goes up. A Taxi immediately stops.

INT. TAXI CAB - SAME

The RADIO blares. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. makes a rousing SPEECH in the name of civil rights. We see bits and pieces of the Young Man -- BLOODSHOT EYES, FINGERS RUBBING HIS TEMPLES -- speaks with difficulty through his hangover.

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE
Hey, man, you mind turning that
off?

DRIVER
That's Dr. King, son.

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE
'less he the kind of doctor that
can write my ass a prescription, I
ain't interested.

EXT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - SAME

SUPER: NEW YORK CITY, 1965

The cab pulls past the marquee and around the corner to the
Stage Door. Sandy is waiting. Pulls the cab door open.

SANDY
Good. Good, good, good. C'mon.
We got fifteen minutes.

Out steps the YOUNG RICHARD PRYOR, 24 and fresh-faced beneath
the pale facade. Looks like he needs a crane to hold him up.
Sandy goes ashen.

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - BACKSTAGE - SAME

Sandy ushers the unsteady Richard through the frenzied halls.
People stare at the nauseous kid.

SANDY
Of all days, Rich. You look near
death and you smell like
afterbirth. This is Ed fucking
Sullivan. Everybody watches
Sullivan. The clubs, Carson, Merv.
Spoke to Bobby Darin's people this
morning? They're talkin' about
havin' you open up a stretch for
'im in Vegas. \$2400 a week. You
pass out on live T.V, forget it.

BOB PRECHT, white, mid-30s and weasly, cuts them off.

PRECHT
This must be Richard.

SANDY

Hiya, Bob. He's a little under the weather, but I promise he'll clean up nice once we get him in makeup.

PRECHT

Richard, I'm Mr. Sullivan's producer, Bob Precht. Glad you could make it this time. Oh God, what is that smell?

Richard promptly THROWS UP ALL OVER HIM.

SANDY

That's it. I'm pulling you. Topo Gigio can go long.

He starts to walk away. Richard grabs his arm.

RICHARD

You gave me a choice, Sandy. I took the cab. I ain't never goin' back to Peoria.

INT. PEORIA, IL - 313 NORTH WASHINGTON AVE. - SAME

An empty living room. A voluptuous WOMAN leads a MAN upstairs. Sexual moaning can be heard in distant rooms.

SUPER: Peoria, Illinois

BUCK, black, mid-40s and solidly built, walks in, stops to flick on a T.V, then heads into the --

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

-- where his brother DICKIE, mid-40s and rotund, sits at the kitchen table playing solitaire while MAMA, mid-60s and hard-looking, stirs a pot of some murky stew on the range while some corn boils in water.

BUCK

Hattie Mae and Lucy Goose got crabs. Dickie, you gon' have to go on down for some crab killer.

MAMA

Gon' have to come out they pay.

BUCK

That stew be ready for Sullivan?

MAMA

I ain't got time fuh such nonsense.
He yo' son. You wanna watch, go
on. Prob'ly won't show up agin,
anyway. Like all you lazy niggas.

DICKIE

You think he loan his Uncle Dickie
some money? He on the T.V, boy
must be makin' some serious cash.

MAMA

Anybody gon' get money out the boy,
it's gon' be me. Shit, I
practically raised the little nigga
myself.

DICKIE

Yeah, but it was Spinks, that nigga
used to pimp over on 8th, give him
his first nut. What was that
bitches name? Penny sumpin'. She
definitely help raise the
motherfucker.

He and Buck laugh. Mama tosses scalding water on both of
them. They jump in pain.

DICKIE

Crazy old bitch.

MAMA

Go on, mind the hos now, Dickie,
'fore you get worse.

Both Dickie and Buck stare at her cracked face, her
unforgiving eyes wide in furious warning. The look on both
their faces... fear. They retreat into the --

INT. PARLOR - SAME

-- where Dickie heads upstairs and Buck settles into the
couch as TOPO GIGIO, the mouse puppet, coos at Ed Sullivan
on T.V.

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - WARDROBE

An annoyed Bob Precht buttons up a fresh shirt as Sandy
pleads with him.

PRECHT

How do I know he's not going to get out there and vomit on Mr. Sullivan?

SANDY

There's nothing left in his stomach. You know the flu. After the flood, it's all dry heaves.

PRECHT

Sure, the flu. Look, he can go on, but Mr. Sullivan is in a foul mood today as it is. If your comic does anything to sully the reputation of this show or this network...

Nothing more need be said. Sandy nods his understanding.

INT. BACKSTAGE - SAME

A cleaned up Richard heads out of the DRESSING ROOM in a rumpled suit, still hurting. Sandy sidles up to him.

SANDY

Better. Now you look like death in a suit. Can I get you some water?

RICHARD

Got any cognac?

SANDY

Very funny. Little pisher.

A PAGE BOY comes up to them.

PAGE BOY

Follow me?

SANDY

Just get through it best you can. I'll handle the fallout.

Richard follows the Page Boy to a spot right behind the CURTAIN. He's left alone. A quiet spot as the chaos of a live show goes on around him.

He pulls back the curtain, peeks through bloodshot eyes at the audience. The squarest bunch you ever saw. All white, mostly older crowd. Stiff, conservative.

By the BACKSTAGE MONITORS Page Boy takes his place next to an older, grizzled stagehand, SAL, 50s.

PAGE BOY
(with glee; re: Richard)
It's all blue hairs tonight. Senor
Wences crowd. Five bucks says this
guy takes a dive.

Sal glances at Richard, rubbing his temples. Look on Sal's face says, 'I'm with ya, kid. I been the underdog, too.'

SAL
You're on.

Sandy overhears the conversation. Bites his nails.

CLOSE ON RICHARD, closes his eyes, goes deep within.

RICHARD (V.O.)
Don't scare the white folks, Rich.
Just be funny, get the money.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - SAME

The Director counts down from commercial.

DIRECTOR
3, 2, and...

INT. STAGE - SAME

A LIGHT comes up on a CAMERA, the CAMERAMAN points at Ed.
We're live.

ED SULLIVAN
Our next young man has been playing
to packed houses at comedy clubs
such as Cafe Wha? and The Bitter
End right here in New York City.
Please welcome Richard Pryor.

INT. BACKSTAGE - SAME

The audience applauds robotically as a STAGE MANAGER opens the curtain for Richard. Sandy watches the monitor as Richard walks out on stage.

INT. STAGE - SAME

Richard stares into the audience. The bright studio lights bare down on him, stinging his eyes. Every step pounds his head like a jackhammer. The audience is hard and cold, daring him to make them laugh. He stops on his mark. Looks like a deer in a headlight. Clears his throat.

RICHARD

I started in show business in 1946,
maybe some of you read about it.

(titters)

I was in a play called
Rumpelstiltskin. I was the wind.
My mother made me a little uniform
which I thought was kinda hip. You
ever seen the wind? I'd run across
the stage. Whoooooo. Do a little
encore. Whoosh.

Scattered laughs from the audience. Most are stone-faced,
including ED, staring at him from the side.

INT. BACKSTAGE MONITORS - SAME

Sandy watches the monitor with bated breath.

RICHARD

But there was a guy, Mr. Conrad,
was in charge of this place,
Everett Irving School...

INT. 313 NORTH WASHINGTON AVE. - PARLOR - SAME

Buck, Dickie, AUNT DEE, 40s, and several others watch.

RICHARD

... in Peoria, Illinois, that's my
hometown...

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - STAGE- SAME

RICHARD

... and Mr. Conrad, his thing was
to introduce the kids, and he
really dug it. He'd come out, walk
up to the mic, make his little
speech. Be like --

Richard mimes and makes the sound of TAPPING A MICROPHONE.

RICHARD
(exaggerated White Voice)
"Is this on? Testing, one -- Is
this adjusted properly? One
moment, please. We're trying to
adjust the electrical equipment.
Is it better now? Good."

The audience laughs collectively for the first time.
Generous, but not uproarious. Ed does not.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - SAME

The Director and crew laugh.

DIRECTOR
Sounds like my kid's principle.

Bob Precht watches them react to Richard with interest.

INT. STAGE - SAME

RICHARD
(exaggerated White Voice)
"Welcome to our annual school play
Rumpelstiltskin. In a moment the
kiddies are gonna come out here and
introduce themselves to you. You
should recognize them, they're your
kiddies."

Audience laughter. Richard is gaining confidence. Looks
better than earlier. The laughter seems to feed him.

RICHARD
"Ready little kiddies? Come out
here and introduce yourselves."

Richard takes a moment, transforms his physical appearance.

RICHARD
(little boy Voice)
Harvey Frump.

The Audience goes into hysterics. Suddenly, before our very
eyes, Richard changes into different CHILDREN, each with
their own unique way about them. Captures them perfectly.

RICHARD
 (little girl's voice)
 Mary Sullivan Smith.
 (new voice)
 Billy Joe Benson.
 (mush-mouthed boy)
 Herman Ellison.

Ed chuckles. Audience laughs and murmurs their recognition.

AUDIENCE
 ... you used to talk like that...
 reminds me of a kid I went to
 school with...

INT. BACKSTAGE - MONITORS - SAME

Sandy overhears a PAGE GIRL cooing to her FRIEND by the monitors.

PAGE GIRL
 Awww, he's adorable.

INT. STAGE - SAME

Richard continues. The delighted audience is now with him.

RICHARD
 Fear not, Lady Fair, I, the
 prince, will go to the woods all
 by myself. I will bring back the
 wicked man.
 (little girl Voice)
 Woe is me, I cannot turn the straw
 into gold, what shall I do? Ooo...
 (little boy Voice)
 Meanwhile, in the forest, we find
 the wicked man, Rumpelstiltskin...

Richard turns into Rumpelstiltskin, continues to act out the scene playing each child with masterful physicality, manic energy, and a sweet vulnerability that can't be faked.

Ed Sullivan watches from the side, nodding his approval.

CAMERAMAN
 (into headset)
 Mr. Sullivan is laughing.

INT. CONTROL BOOTH - SAME

Director turns to Bob Precht.

DIRECTOR

Mr. Sullivan is laughing.

PRECHT

Mr. Sullivan is laughing?

Precht watches Richard on the monitor in amazement.

INT. BACKSTAGE MONITORS - SAME

Sal holds his hand out to the disgruntled Page Boy who plunks a fiver in his palm.

INT. 313 NORTH WASHINGTON AVE. - PARLOR - SAME

A crowd is gathered around the couch watching Richard.

DICKIE

Boy knows how to make them white folks laugh. That's fuh sho'.

MAMA (O.S.)

That ain't Richard.

They all turn to her, surprised.

MAMA

He ever showed hisself for real, all those white motherfuckers'd turn tail and run.

BUCK

Whatchoo 'spect him to do? They ain't let no niggas talk about ho-houses on T.V. My boy smart. He runnin' some serious game.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Shut up. Shut the fuck up.

INT. ED SULLIVAN THEATER - STAGE - SAME

Richard continues his act, while internally trying to silence the VOICES IN HIS HEAD.

RICHARD (V.O.)

This ain't the place. It's my time now. Get the fuck outta my head.

CLOSE ON RICHARD -- on the inside THE VOICES OF HOME ARGUE, but on the outside --

RICHARD

... okey-dokey, Primpcess, kipss me now and I'll bid you, adieu.

(mimes kissing)

To the woods horsey, to the woods.

(mimes horseback-riding)

Boogedy-boogedy-boogedy...

Ed roars along with the audience. The act is triumphant.

INT. BACKSTAGE MONITORS - SAME

Sandy looks around at all the Techs and Stagehands, mesmerized by Richard on the monitors. Turns back to watch Richard, a young dynamo with a glint of desperation in his eyes. Leans over to a STAGEHAND.

SANDY

This kid's gonna do something someday. Something special.

CLOSEUP OF MONITOR WHERE RICHARD PERFORMS.

SANDY (O.S)

If he don't self-destruct first.

BLACK.

INT. TALK SHOWS & CLUBS

Quick cuts of JOHNNY CARSON, MERV GRIFFIN, RUDY VALLEE & CLUB MCs all introducing Richard.

He walks onto various stages -- MR. SHOWBIZ. The ALL WHITE AUDIENCES ROAR WITH LAUGHTER. Richard soaks it up.

CUT TO:

B&W NEWS FOOTAGE. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SPEECH.

MLK

... if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect the whole world is doomed.

FOOTAGE. MARCH FOR VOTING RIGHTS IN SELMA, AL -- ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS ATTACK CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS --

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A hip BOHEMIAN PARTY crowded with comics, artists, hippies. Richard struts through like the King of New York. Well-wishers recognize him, and Richard basks in the attention. He catches the eye of a CHICK across the room.

INT. VARIOUS PLACES - NIGHT

BEDROOMS, CLUB DRESSING ROOMS, HALLWAYS. Richard and VARIOUS WOMEN go at it hot and heavy. He's loving life.

CUT TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE. WATTS RACE RIOTS -- NATIONAL GUARD MARCHING IN -- BLACK MEN BEATEN DOWN --

EXT. LAS VEGAS BOULEVARD - 1966 - DAY

To establish. Sand, sun, and big Marquees. Rat Pack's Vegas.

INT. FLAMINGO - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The ALL WHITE AUDIENCE applauds rapturously as a wide-smiling Richard heads offstage into the --

WINGS -- where BOBBY DARIN, 30, stands with various HANGERS-ON. He claps Richard on the back, grips his shoulders.

BOBBY

What I tell ya? Kills. Everytime.

RICHARD

Just warmin' 'em up for you, Bobby.

Richard glances over to where some SHOWGIRLS are getting ready to go on stage. Catches the eye of one. Smiles at her. We know what's going to happen here.

INT. FLAMINGO BAR - NIGHT

Richard drinks and laughs with Bobby, various WOMEN and the hangers-on. Bobby reads to them from a NEWSPAPER.

BOBBY

Opening for Darin is the young black comic Richard Pryor whose brash yet poignant characterizations bring to mind a hipper more frenzied Bill Cosby...

INT. CASINO FLOOR - NIGHT

Richard plays blackjack with the fellas, living it up and fitting himself neatly into the WHITE SHOWBIZ WORLD.

BOBBY (V.O.)

... but whose stylistic elan is uniquely his own.

CUT TO:

NEWS FOOTAGE. CITY OF TENTS ERECTED ON WHITE HOUSE LAWN --

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)

... where 30 Mississippi blacks built a tent city under President Johnson's window to protest housing conditions in their state.

INT. MERV GRIFFIN SHOW - DAY

JERRY LEWIS, 40, and Richard SPIT ON EACH OTHER playfully as the audience laughs and a delighted Merv looks on. O.S. AUDIENCE LAUGHTER take us to --

EXT. SWANKY DINNER CLUB - PRIVATE PATIO - NIGHT

A PARTY IN PROGRESS. Famous faces mingle, jumping from table to table. Richard stands with his girlfriend MAXINE, 20s, and Sandy. Sandy motions to GROUCHO MARX, late-70s, sitting alone in a booth, having a drink.

SANDY

Jesus. Groucho Marx. Go say hello.

Richard walks over. Extends his hand. Groucho looks up.

RICHARD

Mr. Marx, I'm Richard Pryor, sir.

Groucho takes his hand. Wears a stoic expression.

GROUCHO

Ah. I've seen you. You're a comic.

RICHARD

Yes, sir. Yes I am.

GROUCHO

So, young man, how d'ya want to end up? Have you thought about that?

RICHARD

Sir?

GROUCHO

Do you want a career you're proud of? Or do you want to end up a spitting wad like Jerry Lewis?

This hits Richard hard.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A neon sign bathes the dark room in red. Richard sits at the edge of the bed, smoking and playing guitar softly while Maxine sleeps. He stares off into nothing, lost in thought.

Suddenly, MOANING & CRYING from the street below. He puts down the guitar, walks to the window, looks at the street. An OLD WINO, black, 60s, drunkenly shakes his fist at the sky.

OLD WINO

Lord, you up there? Where you at, motherfucker? It's all goin' to hell down here. You hear me?

MAXINE

(stirs; half-asleep)
What's going on?

RICHARD
Nothin'. Just another nigga can't
get no peace.

He shuts the window with an AUDIBLE THUNK. No more noise.
Shut it out. Shut it all out.

RICHARD
Go back to sleep.

He catches his reflection in the mirror. Is he talking to
her... or to himself?

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES - SUNSET BOULEVARD - 1967 - DAY

Richard's reflection in a REARVIEW MIRROR as he drives up the
STRIP in his convertible. He looks different now -- less a
fresh-faced innocent, more a bad motherfucker. Afro growing
out, sunglasses on, he takes in the strip.

SUPER: LOS ANGELES, 1967

War is in the air and the RADICAL 60s are in full force.
HIPPIES, BLACK REVOLUTIONARIES, PEACE SIGNS, THE MUSIC OF
CHANGE.

EXT. SUNSET TOWER MOTEL - DAY

A run-down FLOP HOUSE with the requisite DRUG DEALERS,
WHORES, & ASSORTED WEIRDOS.

Richard bounds through, OBSERVING THE ECLECTIC RESIDENTS
CLOSELY as he makes his way through the courtyard, around the
pool, up the stairs and onto the walkway. Looks akin to
them. At home here. These are his people. Passes DIRTY
DICK, black, 30s, on the stairs.

RICHARD
Dirty Dick. Whatchoo got, man?

DIRTY DICK
Some cocaine with your name on the
cellophane.

RICHARD
Solid. Gimme a minute.

INT. RICHARD'S MOTEL ROOM - SAME

Richard enters his room to find BRANDI, 20s, a sexy little white dancer, dressing for work, listening to the radio. He digs through an old pair of pants on a chair.

BRANDI

What time's your show tonight?

RICHARD

11:30.

BRANDI

Good, 'cause I don't get out of the Whiskey 'til 2. You wanna come up to Carol's with me? I gotta borrow a pair of Go-Go boots. We're gonna smoke some grass, watch Bewitched.

RICHARD

I'll meet you. I gotta go downstairs, take care 'a somethin'.

BRANDI

(remembering something)

Oh.

She runs out of the room. Richard pulls some cash out of his pants, heads for the door. Brandi comes back in holding a large PILE OF CHECKS.

BRANDI

I found a whole bunch of uncashed checks lying around. Mostly Vegas. Flamingo, the Aladdin... it's, like, thousands of dollars.

Richard turns on her. Angrily grabs them from her hand.

RICHARD

Bitch, what I tell you 'bout goin' through my shit?

BRANDI

I thought you'd be happy.

RICHARD

Stay outta my drawers, Brandi.

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Richard enters, checks to make sure Brandi's in the other room. Stares at the checks-- it's a lot of money.

BRANDI (O.S.)

Jeez. Don't be so paranoid.

He shoves the pile of checks under the mattress.

EXT. SUNSET TOWER MOTEL - POOL - SAME

Richard pays Dirty Dick, takes a couple grams of cocaine. Glances up toward the second floor WALKWAY. Notices Brandi entering another room. He taps some coke out. Does a bump.

INT. CAROL'S ROOM - SAME

PAUL MOONEY, tall, black, 20s, opens the door for Richard, who's jumpy now. Wired. Paul looks him up and down.

PAUL

Brandi's in the other room with Carol pickin' out shoes.

BRANDI (O.S.)

Watch some T.V, baby. I'll be in in a sec.

Richard enters.

RICHARD

How you doin', man? Rich.

PAUL

Paul. Have a seat.

They head for the couch. Sit down in front of the T.V.

PAUL

You look familiar. We met before?

RICHARD

Don't think so. Whatchoo watchin'?

PAUL

Anti-war protest in Central Park. Stokely Carmichael's gonna speak.

RICHARD
Oh, right on. Cool.

PAUL
Brother talks about "a call for
black people in this country to
unite, to recognize their heritage,
and to build a sense of community."
That's deep, right?

RICHARD
As an old ho's pussy.

Paul's taken aback.

PAUL
You do believe in Black Power,
don't you brother?

RICHARD
Not as much as green power. As in,
he who has the green has the power.

Richard cracks himself up. Paul is unmoved.

PAUL
You know we got almost half a
million motherfuckers over in
Vietnam already? Most of 'em poor
black folk?

RICHARD
(distracted)
That right?

PAUL
Yeah, that's right. Whatchoo think
about that?

RICHARD
I try not to.

PAUL
(disgust)
You telling me you ain't got no
thoughts about your own people
getting shipped out the country to
die for no good motherfuckin'
reason?

Richard's been looking distractedly towards the bedroom.
Notices Paul staring at him hard demanding an answer.

RICHARD

You wanna know what I think?

PAUL

I wanna know you do think? Jittery motherfucker.

RICHARD

I think the United States government's gone got themselves some new niggas, the Vietnamese, and they figured why not make the old niggas fight the new niggas? Let 'em wipe each other out, solve communism and that uppity civil rights shit once and for all.

Paul nods with respect. Thinks about this a long time.

PAUL

I like the way your mind works.

Richard leans toward Paul, conspiratorially.

RICHARD

Yeah? How you like this? There's two of them and two of us. Whatchoo say we get somethin' started?

PAUL

What'd you have in mind?

RICHARD

An orgy, nigga.

PAUL

You serious?

RICHARD

Yeah, I'm serious. I feel like fuckin'.

EXT. WALKWAY - SAME

Paul tosses Richard out in a rage. He pulls free of him.

RICHARD

Get your hand off-a me.

PAUL

Carol's my sister, nigga.

RICHARD
How's I s'posed to know that shit?

PAUL
Just get outta here. Sick
motherfucker.

RICHARD
My lady's in there, jack.

PAUL
I'll kick her skinny white ass out
in a minute.

Richard starts heading off, muttering to himself.

RICHARD
... oughta get my piece... shoot
you in the face, motherfucker...

Paul calls after him --

PAUL
Hey --

Richard stops turns.

PAUL
Now I know where I seen you.
You're a comic, right?

RICHARD
So what?

PAUL
So I seen you around the clubs,
that's what. They ain't the
motherfuckers I play, but still...

RICHARD
Yeah? Well, piss on you, jack.

Richard heads off. Paul watches him go, considering
something.

EXT. FAIRFAX - DAY

Richard and Sandy walk up the street. Richard is depressed.
Seeking guidance.

SANDY

What, restless? You got the Sid Caesar picture comin' out, Vegas... You want, I'll book you more shows.

RICHARD

S'not what I mean. You look around, shit's goin' down like a motherfucker, and I'm doing variations on the same act I've been doing for three years.

SANDY

(shrugs)

You stick with what works. That's how you maintain longevity in this business.

RICHARD

Just feels like everything's changing but me. Brave new world, same old nigga.

SANDY

Do me a favor, don't use that word around me. Makes me uncomfortable.

RICHARD

Sorry. I don't know, gettin' laughs used to make me feel... it used to be enough, but lately I just don't feel... connected.

SANDY

So write some new jokes.

RICHARD

Look around, man. You see anything funny?

Sandy nods his understanding. They come to a NEWSSTAND. Sandy buys a NEWSPAPER.

INT. CANTOR'S DELI - SAME

Richard is slumped while Sandy noshes and reads the paper.

SANDY

"Summer of Rioting". Country's goin' crazy.

RICHARD

Can I ask you a serious question?

SANDY

I'm always here for you. You know that.

RICHARD

You think it's possible to grow up in whorehouse... and not become a whore?

Sandy puts down his paper. Focuses on Richard.

SANDY

Listen to me. Look at me, 'cause I care about you, and I can see your head ain't right. Everything's changing but you? Maybe you're right, but lemme tell you, people are gonna look to you as a constant. Why? 'Cause you got that rare ability to make 'em laugh. To make 'em happy. Their kids are gettin' shipped off to some jungle death trap and you for 45 minutes, you make their lives more bearable. You wanna feel connected? Connect to them. The ones who need it. Tell stories. Crack wise. Let the world change. You stay funny.

CLOSE ON RICHARD as he considers the advice.

RICHARD (V.O.)

This is my impression of a heart talkin' to a brain in the same body.

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Richard performs to a packed house. He's more serious than usual. More interior. Holds the mic close and makes the sound of a HEARTBEAT. In a TAUNTING VOICE --

RICHARD

Brain... Braaaaaiiiilin.....

(different; defensive
Voice)

Whaddaya want?

(heartbeat; taunting)
(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
You've been naughty, brain...
(heartbeat; defensive
Brain voice)
Go to hell...

Laughter. He continues the sound of a heartbeat, as a fascinated Paul watches in the back.

RICHARD
Don't make me angry, brain...
(heartbeat; pissed off
Brain voice)
Drop dead...

Richard does the sound of the Heartbeat, tapering it off as it dies away to nothing, as if the heart is intentionally killing itself to kill the brain and the body it resides in.

EXT. COMEDY CLUB - SAME

A sallow, thoroughly exhausted Richard heads up the street to his car. Paul follows.

PAUL
Hey, homes.

Richard turns, notices Paul. He stands a little taller, and struts off. Not gonna pay him no mind.

PAUL
You don't seem surprised.

RICHARD
You think I ain't seen you at my shows? Hidin' in the back like a cockroach? I see everything, nigga. Fuck you want anyway?

PAUL
Saw you struggling up there tonight.

RICHARD
You better get your eyes checked. Niggas was doubled over.

PAUL
I meant with yourself. And I didn't see no niggas doubled over. I didn't see no niggas at all in there.

RICHARD

With myself? You know what I make per show? Only thing I struggle with's what to spend it on.

PAUL

It's all about the monies, huh? You makin' so much, how come you live in that shithole up on Sunset?

RICHARD

That's my business.

PAUL

Take a ride with me.

RICHARD

I'm fixin' to get fucked up and sucked off. Ain't none of that involve me takin' a ride with you.

PAUL

Lemme catch a ride with you, then. Buy you a drink.

Richard stops at his car, turns, just stares at him. *Where's this guy comin' from?*

PAUL

I overreacted the other day, just wanted a chance to make it up.

RICHARD

You a faggot?

PAUL

(smiles)

That's what I like about you, man. I ain't never met nobody first thing pops in their head pops right on out their mouth. Nah, it ain't like that.

RICHARD

Then what's your angle, nigga?

PAUL

You need one?

RICHARD

You got one. I just wanna know what it is. And don't bullshit me, neither.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Don't ever try and play me for no fool, 'cause I got a nose for the truth like a muh-fuckin' bloodhound, and I can smell bullshit before it comes out the bull, you dig?

PAUL

Yeah, I bet you can. But I don't know, must be there's so much bullshit in the air these days, you can't seem to smell your own.

Richard narrows his eyes. Thinks about this.

INT. RICHARD'S CAR - NIGHT

A suspicious Richard drives Paul through Los Angeles.

PAUL

I thought about what you said the last few days 'bout the government sending the old niggas to fight the new niggas.

RICHARD

So?

PAUL

So... you ain't never catch Cosby sayin' that shit.

RICHARD

Yeah, tha's why that nigga's gettin' rich.

PAUL

Okay, so white folks already got one pet nigga. Why they need you?

RICHARD

Watch yourself, man. I ain't nobody's pet nigga.

PAUL

I'm sorry, but, man, I think you might actually have somethin' to say only, for some reason, you ain't sayin' it. Not on stage, anyway. And in this day and age? That shit's a high crime. Look around, man.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)
Our people ain't gonna stand livin'
in these conditions they got us in
no more --

RICHARD
(sings)
People get ready/ there's a change
comin'...

PAUL
Yeah, you laugh. Started with
Watts, now they're rioting in
Brooklyn, they're rioting in
Chicago, Cleveland, Baltimore. Oh,
it's goin' down. Newark's a
goddamn wasteland, nigga, and
you're up there shuckin' and jivin'
talkin' 'bout let's play improv.

RICHARD
Yeah? And you talkin' 'bout stupid
motherfuckers who're burnin' their
own neighborhoods down.

PAUL
Maybe they know something you ain't
learned yet.

RICHARD
And what might that be?

PAUL
Might be you got to burn down the
old shit before you can build the
new shit.

Richard mulls this over a while. Seems to resonate.

RICHARD
Whatchoo expect me to do, man?
Change the world? I'm a comic.

PAUL
I ain't talkin' 'bout change. I'm
talkin' 'bout revolution.

RICHARD
Nigga, now I know you out your
head.

PAUL
Revolution ain't just about
rioting.

(MORE)

PAUL (cont'd)

It's about ideas put plain in the language of the people. It's about brothers that can articulate those ideas.

(beat)

You ain't just a comic, blood. You got a platform. You got food for thought. And niggas is starvin'.

(beat)

Turn right up here.

EXT. REDD'S - NIGHT

To establish. Richard pulls up, parks. They get out. Head across the street to the club. A NEON SIGN says REDD'S.

INT. REDD'S - NIGHT

Richard follows Paul inside. A ROWDY ALL-BLACK ATMOSPHERE.

PAUL

Ever been?

RICHARD

Shit, everybody know about Redd's, man. My agent don't book me these kinda places.

PAUL

Big surprise.

They head over to the BAR. On stage, REDD FOXX, 50's, gruff, entertains the crowd. The words he speaks -- raw, raunchy, uncensored, hypnotic. Richard is mesmerized.

PAUL

C'mon. Let's go meet Redd.

INT. STAGE EXIT - SAME

Paul walks with Redd away from the stage as Richard trails behind. Several LADIES swarm Redd, sweet and congratulatory. Redd is both fatherly and lascivious at the same time.

REDD

Thank you... thank you, dear...
Goddamn, look at that bubble ass.

(to Richard)

Yeah, I seen you on the T.V shows.
The Merv Griffin, right?

(MORE)

REDD (cont'd)
So whatchoo want? Bust yuh cherry
for the black folks?

RICHARD
My ass got dragged down here, man.

REDD
Well, drag your ass on out then.
Mooney, why you bring this rude
motherfucker?

PAUL
Nigga's got a gift he ain't opened
yet.

RICHARD
Motherfucker, why you keep actin'
like you know me?

Redd considers what Paul said.

REDD
You wanna play my club or not?

Richard thinks about this. Doesn't want to be rude again.
Suddenly, Redd yells across the crowded club to the COMEDIAN
on stage.

REDD
HEY, HARVEY!

All eyes in the club go to Redd. Harvey stops his act.

HARVEY
I'm in the middle of my set, Redd.

REDD
Not no more you ain't. Get off my
stage, nigga. You ain't funny.
Go on, get your half-chink ass back
to Chinatown. Ain't nobody here
speak Niggerese.

The Audience busts up laughing.

REDD
(to Richard)
You up.

Richard looks at Paul. What now?

PAUL
This is your wake-up call.

Redd glances down at a TABLE near him. Pulls a SWITCHBLADE FROM HIS POCKET and SLAMS THE BLADE INTO THE TABLE, PINNING SOME MONEY DOWN. A scared MAN pulls his hand away from the money. Redd's warning.

REDD

That money don't belong to you,
nigga. Get the fuck out my club,
'fore I carve you up like a turkey.

The MAN slinks off. Redd turns back to Richard. A deer in a headlight. Things work differently around here.

JUMP CUT TO:

STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

REDD

Some of you niggas prob'ly seen him
on Merv Griffin if you managed to
hook up those T.V's you thievin'
motherfuckers stole. Go on. Give
him a hand... Richard Pryor.

Applause. Richard comes on. Rumpled, tired, sweaty, and more timid than usual.

RICHARD

Hi... uh... I don't know, I just
got thrown up, so...

AUDIENCE MEMBER

You look like you got thrown up.
Damn, nigga, you got sickle cell?

RICHARD

No, man, I don't have sickle cell.
But... I am from Peoria, and --

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Where the fuck's that?

RICHARD

Where? It's in Illinois.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Maybe tha's why you Ill-annoying,
nigga.

The crowd busts up, while the Audience Member gets props from his FRIEND.

FRIEND

Gimme some skin, gimme some skin...

In the back, Redd turns to Paul.

REDD

These drunk ass niggas gonna eat him alive.

RICHARD

That's good, man. No, but I do come from an average sized family. Eleven kids.

(titters)

No mother and father, just kids. We used to take baths on Saturday night. Was really great, 'cause we had a big washtub... my grandmother would bootleg during the week, and on the weekends she'd empty this tub out and wash us up. And sometimes you get washed up 3 or 4 times, 'cause somebody didn't show up. She be like... gimme a kid...

Makes a WASHING SOUND. Titters from the audience. Another AUDIENCE GIRL and AUDIENCE GUY start heckling him.

AUDIENCE GIRL

She shoulda washed yo' ass some mo', 'cause you still stink.

RICHARD

Uh... thank you... and she -- she --

AUDIENCE GUY

Stuttering motherfucker...

RICHARD

You wanna come up here, try this?

AUDIENCE GUY

You don't want me comin' up. I'll whup yo ass, nigga.

RICHARD

S'just a show, man. Relax. Tell you what, let's... play a game called improvisation. You'll like this. You call out a person and a situation, and I'll act it out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
Yo' mama suckin' my dick.

The audience cracks up. Richard is ashen. In the back, Redd glances at Paul -- 'This boy's toast.'

EXT. REDD'S - SAME

Richard runs across the street toward his car. Paul follows.

PAUL
You needed that.

RICHARD
I need cocaine's what I need.

PAUL
Sure, drown it out. Whatever you gotta do to make the lies you tell yourself everyday go down easier. But you can't hide forever, nigga.
(beat)
Remember where you came from.

Richard whirls and makes for Paul. In an instant, Paul know he's gone too far. Richard grabs him by the throat, throws him up against a brick wall. His eyes are aflame.

RICHARD
You think you know where I came from?

There's fear in Paul's eyes, but he nods.

RICHARD
Then you remember. Nigga.

Richard turns, jumps in his car. Peels off as Paul watches.

INT. RICHARD'S CAR - SAME

Richard speeds through the streets of L.A, lost in thought. He pulls out his BAGGIE OF COKE. Tries to dump some on his fist for a bump. It falls all over the STEERING WHEEL.

Desperately, Richard sniffs the entire steering wheel, leaving not a speck undone.

INT. SUNSET TOWER MOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

High as a kite, Richard walks through the lobby, muttering to himself. The CLERK at the front desk looks up from his T.V. Notices Richard and shakes his head.

CLERK

Don't be startin' no trouble
tonight, okay pal? I had three
incidents already with the he/shes,
'n I'm tired. You look lit to pop,
so...

Richard pauses a moment, closes his eyes -- *Why's everybody fuckin' with me tonight?* -- then moves on.

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard pulls the uncashed checks from under the mattress. Stares at them a while. Then suddenly, grabs a lighter -- puts the flame under one of them. Watches it burn. In his eyes, a decision is made.

EXT. RICHARD'S ROOM - WALKWAY - SAME

Richard carries the pile of checks and a BOTTLE OF JACK DANIELS, throws the checks down, pours the jack over them. Leans over and LIGHTS THE PILE UP.

The Clerk comes out of his office, points up at him from below.

CLERK

Hey, what'd I say?

Richard ignores him. Watches the pile burn. Suddenly, he STAMPS OUT THE FIRE. He can't do it.

He falls to his knees. Desperately sifts through the checks to see if they're intact. He's tortured. Whimpers.

RICHARD

... no... please...

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. FRONT OFFICE - SAME

Richard bursts in, eyes wide, heads towards the CLERK.

CLERK

Cops are on their way, jerk wad.
You ain't burnin' down my place
like your bros burned down Watts.

Richard takes a swig from the JD BOTTLE.

CLERK

What is it with you people and
fire?

-- SMASH! Richard BASHES THE BOTTLE OF JACK AGAINST THE
CLERK'S HEAD. He goes down in a mess of blood and broken
glass. Richard jumps over the front desk. Stands over the
screaming Clerk, threateningly.

RICHARD

Why you ain't laughing now, huh?
Wassa matter? I'm only funny to
you white motherfuckers on stage,
izzat it? I ain't funny now?

Richard proceeds to kick him, mercilessly.

EXT. SUNSET TOWER MOTEL - NIGHT

NIGHTCRAWLERS watching, Richard is dragged in HANDCUFFS to a
POLICE CAR. He's high as kite. Out of his skull and out of
control.

RICHARD

I AIN'T NOBODY'S PET NIGGA.

VARIOUS ONLOOKERS

You tell 'em, honey... tha's right,
don't you take no shit, now...
stick it to the Man, black...

He screams out, terrified as he's shoved into the back of the
car. The DOOR is slammed shut.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Richard is thrown into a CELL kicking, screaming and crying.
The cell door is slammed behind him. Richard screams at his
captors.

RICHARD

I know me, motherfucker.

COP (O.C.)
Sleep it off, pal.

Richard shakes the bars, bangs himself against them. A raging animal in a cage.

RICHARD
I ain't nobody's pet nigga... pigs,
lemme outta this cage... I AIN'T
NOBODY'S PET NIGGA... !!!

FADE OUT.

EXT. VEGAS STRIP - ALADDIN HOTEL - DUSK

To establish.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Richard dresses. Meticulous in his tux. Checks himself out in the mirror.

INT. STAGE - SAME

The chatter of the crowd. A single mic stand on stage, and suddenly -- A BOOMING VOICE --

BOOMING VOICE (V.O.)
*Ladies and gentlemen, the Aladdin
Hotel and Casino is proud to
present... Richard Pryor...*

Richard walks out to THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. A big smile on his face. The old Richard. Ready to please. He pulls the mic from the mic stand. Moves to the front of the stage.

He starts to say something, then freezes. Stands stock still, staring out into the eager all white Upper Class audience. After a moment, they realize something is wrong, and the murmuring begins. Suddenly --

RICHARD
What the fuck am I doin' here?

He drops the mic which hits the floor with a loud BANG that echoes through the house. The audience erupts into chatter as Richard heads offstage.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - SAME

Sandy accosts him as Richard gathers up his things.

SANDY

What're you doin', Rich? Get out there and perform.

RICHARD

Dance, nigga, dance? Uh-uh. That ain't me no more.

SANDY

Whoever it is, it's what they're paying you for. You signed a contract. You got responsibilities.

RICHARD

Exactly.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - SAME

The ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR joins the caravan to the exit.

ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR

What's the hell's going on?

SANDY

You do this, you'll never work in this town again. You hear me?

Sandy stops, calls after him.

SANDY

YOU'LL NEVER WORK IN THIS TOWN AGAIN!!!

EXT. LAS VEGAS BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Richard speeds out of town. SIGN READS: **You are now leaving Las Vegas.** He takes a deep, cleansing breath. *What now?*

Richard hits the gas pedal. the SOUND OF THE ENGINE REVVING brings us --

BACK TO:

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - 2005 - DAY

-- where a DIALYSIS MACHINE noisily springs to life.

Richard is lifted on to his bed by CARMEN and another NURSE, helpless as a newborn. They unzip his track suit. Prep him for his routine. Fuss with the machine.

VINGETTES of the DIALYSIS PROCEDURE -- the messy, precise and truly odd amalgamation of man and machine -- the blinking of artificial lights, numbers and readings -- the flushing of the kidneys -- the humiliation of helplessness.

Richard's eyes are blank, distant.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Jennifer sorts through the CD rack. Grabs a MILES DAVIS CD, exits into --

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - SAME

-- where Richard undergoes the uncomfortable ritual. Jennifer pops Miles into a CD player and suddenly the room is flooded with the sweet sounds of the horn.

The organic music seems incongruous with the artificiality of the machines -- but it's welcome.

She walks to his bedside as the machine does its work and the Nurses take its readings. His eyes soften as he listens to the music. Jennifer strokes his head, tenderly.

JENNIFER

Miles, Richard. Remember Miles?

She kisses his forehead. Richard opens his mouth with difficulty and some strangled sounds come out as if he's desperately trying to say something.

He goes silent again. Jennifer nods in understanding.

JENNIFER

It's okay, I know... you separate yourself... I'm here... I'm not going anywhere...

But he is. Richard's eyes glaze over, separating himself from the procedure. Distancing himself from the pain of the present... and remembering...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MACDOUGAL STREET - NYC - 1968 - NIGHT

A quiet Greenwich Village evening. The streets are dusted with snow. Neon lights advertise jazz, coffee, folk, and comedy in equal measure. A virtual Bohemia. We settle on a SIGN for the VILLAGE GATE. TONIGHT: MILES DAVIS.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

When're you coming back?

INT. VILLAGE GATE - PHONE BOOTH - SAME

The sound of a TRUMPET can be heard in a distant room. Booth pulled shut, a worn out Richard talks intimately with his girlfriend SHELLY, white, 20s. INTERCUT.

RICHARD

I don't know. I got some more shows. And... some shit I gotta figure out.

SHELLY

I miss you.

RICHARD

Yeah. Me too, Shell.

SHELLY

Keep me in your --

Too late. He's hung up.

INT. VILLAGE GATE - NIGHT

MILES DAVIS, 40s, blows on stage, taking the mesmerized audience including Richard along on an aural odyssey. There's a sonic authenticity that's palpable, visibly resonates with Richard.

EXT. BLEECKER STREET - NIGHT

Miles swaggers up the block with an aura of effortless cool. He stops to hail a taxi. Richard creeps up behind him. Miles' voice is deep, dangerous.

RICHARD

Hey, man.

MILES

Fuck you want?

RICHARD

I was hoping I could get a couple minutes. I'm Richard Pry --

MILES

I know you, nigga. We work the same goddamn club. You the jive motherfucker don't ever make me laugh. Now get out the way. Hard enough for one nigga to catch a cab.

Richard starts to slink away. Miles thinks, stops him.

MILES

Hey. Hold up, youngblood.

Richard turns. A taxi stops for Miles.

MILES

You got any money?

INT. GYPSY LADY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small cold-water flat decorated sumptuously, like a whorehouse. Miles sits on the couch with the beautiful GYPSY LADY, late 30s, dark and mysterious. Richard sits on the floor across from them.

On the COFFEE TABLE between them a MOUNTAIN OF UNCUT COCAINE. Miles cuts it.

RICHARD

I wish I could do what you do, man. Get up there, blow some honest shit.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
I get on stage, see the audience
all ready to judge my black ass and
alls I want to do is be what they
want me to be, cash the check.

MILES
Then riff on that shit -- pleasin'
whitey, bein' a nigga, bitches,
shit you know. Go on. Hit that.

Miles points to the coke. Richard leans over, does a line.
Miles reaches for his case. Takes out the trumpet.

RICHARD
You gonna play?

MILES
We gon' play.

RICHARD
I ain't got no instrument.

MILES
Nigga, your mind's your instrument.
Your body. You use 'em every night
on stage. Problem is, you don't
play nothin' but chopsticks. Now,
I'm'a play lick, and you hit me
back. Dig?

GYPSY LADY
Oh, this is gonna be good.

Miles blows a sweet and steady lick. Looks to Richard.

RICHARD
Whatchoo want me to say?

MILES
Anything, motherfucker. Free your
mind. Do what you feel.

Miles blows another perfect lick, looks at Richard. Richard
takes a moment then --

-- MIMICS MILES' TRUMPET SOUND, BLOWING A SWEET LICK OUT OF
HIS LIPS -- IT'S UNCANNY!

Miles erupts.

MILES
You makin' fun of me, motherfucker?

RICHARD

You said --

MILES

Jive motherfucker you don't listen.
Take your sorry ass to the street.
You a sad cat.

RICHARD

Wait, please. Just -- one more
time. I get it.

MILES

(beat; exhales)

I'm'a kick some wisdom atcha one
last time, and you best kick it
back or I'm'unna kick your ass.

Richard leans over the table, does a long line of WHITE
COURAGE. Miles plays a lick.

RICHARD

We was at -- we was outside...
waitin' on a cab... ?

MILES

So what?

RICHARD

So cabs don't take you anyplace you
wanna go. You get in a cab, say
'Take me to 96th st.' Nigga say --
(cab driver voice)
"You gonna give me a tip?"
(Richard's voice)
Yeah, I'm gonna tip your
motherfuckin' cab over, you don't
take me to 96th street.

Gypsy Lady chuckles. Miles doesn't.

GYPSY LADY

Cute.

MILES

That's some 'a the same shit you
doin' now. You gotta dig,
motherfucker. Deep.

RICHARD

Yeah, but I don't know what --

Miles cuts him off with a lick. It's masterful and true all in one stroke. Stops looks at Richard. He's silent.

MILES

You better say somethin', and fast, nigga. Whatchoo thinkin'?

RICHARD

(thinking; softly)

I'm thinkin'... why they ain't never had no black heroes? I always wanted to go to the movies and see a black hero. Be like...

(Richard makes a horn sound again)

Look up in the sky... it's a bird, it's a plane, it's... Super Nigger.

Gypsy Lady laughs. Miles shakes his head.

MILES

Deeper, motherfucker. Into your soul. Nigga, wha's your most favorite thing in the world?

RICHARD

The truth? Pussy.

MILES

(smiles)

Hit me with it.

Miles blows.

RICHARD

I like pussy. But...

Richard thinks. Goes deep inside himself.

MILES

But what, nigga?

No response. Miles blows a lick.

RICHARD

But it's fucked up, 'cause you can't talk about fuckin' in America.

Miles and Richard start a call and response. Miles blows.

RICHARD

You can't talk about fuckin' but
you talk about killin', tha's cool?
I don't understand that shit.

Miles blows.

RICHARD

Shit, nigga, I'd rather cum. I've
had money never felt as good as I
felt when I cum...

GYPSY LADY

(laughs)

Speak, honey.

Miles blows. Richard gets lost in what he's saying.

RICHARD

And I like white women, too.

(Miles blows)

'Cause white women take more shit
than black women, like, you be at
home gettin' ready to go out and
you say, "I'm goin' out, baby.
Take it easy", and they be like --

(white woman's voice)

"Okay, have fun... toodalooo..."

MILES

So what? So the fuck what?

RICHARD

(gaining confidence)

So, you say that to a black woman
the bitch start dressin', too.

For the first time, Miles laughs. A deep down belly laugh.

RICHARD

She be like, 'Yeah, nigga, me too.
You'se a lyin' motherfucker you
think you goin' out without me.'
And they get that head to move...

(making circles w/ his
head)

"Yeah motherfucker."

Miles tries to blow, but he can't through his laughter.

MILES

Now that's the truth, man...

Richard smiles, confidence growing. Off Miles' exhilarated laughter --

INT. COMEDY CLUB - LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

Richard continues his new act for an all white audience.

RICHARD

And they get that head to move.
"Yeeeeeeaaaah, motherfucker."

Richard stares into the audience. Not so much as a giggle, just blank stares, mouths agape. The CLUB MANAGER glares at a crestfallen Sandy in the back.

SANDY

He's just experimenting with new material. This is what comics do.

EXT. COMEDY CLUB - SAME

Sandy and Richard argue.

SANDY

You're gonna burn every bridge we ever built just so you can say some dirty words?

RICHARD

Let 'em burn, man. We'll build new ones.

SANDY

Baby, comedy's about common ground. This new thing you're doing, you're excluding people.

RICHARD

You're wrong, Sandy. I'm including people. Tryin' to show 'em a world they don't know nothin' about.

SANDY

I can't watch you do this to yourself. You go down this road, you go it alone, kid.

RICHARD

Alone? Nah, man. I don't think so.

EXT. REDD'S - NIGHT

A nervous Richard and Paul cross the street toward the club.

PAUL

Problem is people don't talk about
nothin' real. That's why niggas
gonna listen when you talk about
some real shit. Like --

INT. REDD'S - STAGE - NIGHT

Richard performs for a small black crowd.

RICHARD

-- jackin' off. A lotta people
pretend they didn't jack off. I
did. I'd jack off so much, I knew
the pussy couldn't be as good as my
hand.

Though small, they all listen and laugh attentively.

INT. RICHARD & SHELLY'S HOUSE - DAY

Shelly argues with Richard as Paul watches T.V NEWS FOOTAGE
of the MARTIN LUTHER KING ASSASSINATION & SUBSEQUENT BLACK
UPRISINGS.

SHELLY

How can you get up there every
night and put our lives on display
like that?

RICHARD

It's my life, and it's the truth.
And if the truth hurt then keep
your ass out the goddamn club,
bitch.

PAUL

(re: News)

You want the truth? Truth is,
black folks gon' need somethin' to
laugh about.

EXT. REDD'S - NIGHT

The MARQUEE reads RICHARD PRYOR. QUICK CUTS as the line outside Redd's grows and grows.

INT. REDD'S - NIGHT

Richard performs for a larger, more demonstrative audience.

RICHARD

My family only fucked in one position. Up and down. I had uncles be like, "Boy, don't you ever kiss no pussy. I mean that. Whatever you do in life, don't kiss no pussy." I couldn't wait to kiss the pussy. He'd been wrong about everything else. Women had to beat me off. "That's enough, that's enough. Two days..."

A LAUGHING MAN from audience interrupts.

LAUGHING MAN

Nigga, you crazy.

RICHARD

Believe that, motherfucker.

INT. REDD'S - LATER

Richard comes offstage to rapturous applause. A WAITER hands him a drink as he comes off.

WAITER

You got a phone call at the bar.

Richard heads over. Grabs the phone from the BARTENDER.

RICHARD

Who's 'is?

(beat)

Bitch, don't be callin' me when I'm workin'. I'll be home when I'm --

(meekly)

...what...? Yeah...

He hangs up. Looks downcast, broken.

BARTENDER

Wassup Rich? You okay?

SOUND OF AN AIRPLANE TAKING OFF TAKES US TO --

EXT. PEORIA, ILLINOIS - DAY

Richard and Shelly drive through the town. A look of wariness on Richard's face. Stoic, grim.

Richard stares at a VARIOUS BUILDINGS through the windshield. Significance in every look. Things happened here. Things he'd clearly rather forget.

EXT. 313 NORTH WASHINGTON AVE. - DAY

Richard pulls up outside the house. Stares at it through the windshield with dread. Shelly notices he's somewhere else. Slips her hand into his and squeezes. He takes a deep breath.

They exit the car. Walk up the lawn. Head into the house. Inside, we hear lots of commotion. Laughter. Greetings.

INT. ST. PATRICK'S GYMNASIUM - DAY

Richard stands over Buck in the open casket. Stares down at him. Mixed emotions behind those eyes. Swallows hard. Behind him, Uncle Dickie and Mama converse.

MAMA

'least the boy was fuckin' when his heart went out.

UNCLE DICKIE

Nigga was fifty-seven. Bitch was eighteen years old. Not a bad way, if it's yo' time.

RICHARD

Mind if I have a minute, mama?

MAMA

Sure, baby. Let's leave the boy alone.

They retreat.

RICHARD

Eighteen, huh, pop?

Richard laughs through a tear. Pulls a HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL out. Reaches down and tucks it into Buck's suit jacket.

RICHARD

Case there's any action up there.

INT. REDD'S - AFTER HOURS - NIGHT

Richard and Redd sit at a table in the semi-empty club, LINES OF COKE laid out before them. EMPLOYEES clean around them.

Redd snorts a long line. Richard lays out a longer line. Snorts it. Redd lays out an ever longer line. Does it. Paul walks up.

PAUL

Cocaine Olympics?

Richard lays out a mind-bogglingly long line. Snorts it all. Amazing.

REDD

Nigga's goin' for the gold.

RICHARD

Bitch was eighteen, man. My dad came and went at the same time.

(off their laughter)

Almost make a nigga think there's more to life than pussy. Tell you man, I gotta start gettin' inna the shit that's on the T.V. Panthers and whatnot. Serious black shit.

PAUL

That's what I been sayin', but all you wanna talk about's the pussy.

RICHARD

Like when you talk about Malcolm, Redd.

REDD

Son, I knew Malcolm. Personally. You wanna talk some meaningful shit, you ask yourself, whatchoo really know about the Panthers?

RICHARD

They some bad niggas. I know that.

REDD

You know about their social programs? Food and clothing drives? Neighborhood watches and shit? Or you think they just some gun-toting, trouble-makin' niggas?

RICHARD

They tryin' to change the world.

PAUL

Make it safe for the negro.

REDD

You really wanna know wha's goin' on, 'stead 'a gettin' all your shit from the T.V news, you go on up to Berkeley sometime. Talk about the truth, that shit slap you in the face every mornin' you step out the door. Far as this changin' world is concerned, tha's the muh'fuckin' center of the universe.

INT. RICHARD & SHELLY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Richard cradles his NEWBORN BABY, kisses her, puts her back in the bassinet.

RICHARD

(whispers)

See you soon, baby girl.

Goes to the bed and throws the last of his things in a small suitcase. The sound of a shower comes from the bathroom. Stops. Shelly walks in, towel wrapped around her.

SHELLY

What's this?

RICHARD

I'm goin' upstate for a while.

SHELLY

When did you decide this?

RICHARD

Last night.

SHELLY

Were you gonna tell me?

RICHARD

You're smart. I knew you'd figure it out when you saw me packin'.

SHELLY

You irresponsible sonofabitch.

He grabs his suitcase, exits.

INT. HOUSE - SAME

Shelly chases him through the house, livid. He's interested only in getting out.

SHELLY

That's fine. Go ahead. Do the same thing to me you did to Maxine. Maybe I should sue your ass for child support, too.

RICHARD

You won't have to.

SHELLY

Maybe I'll just take Rain and go someplace you'll never find us.

Richard whirls on her. Grabs her by the throat, and prepares to punch her in the face. Sees her fear. Softens.

RICHARD

I gotta do this.

EXT. RICHARD & SHELLY'S HOUSE - SAME

Richard heads down the driveway and into Paul's waiting car.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - SAME

Slides in next to Paul.

PAUL

You sure you wanna go?

RICHARD

My ex got a warrant after me, and my future ex goin' crazy on my ass. Time to get the fuck outta dodge.

Paul laughs. And suddenly --

BAM! Shelly has JUMPED ON THE HOOD OF PAUL'S CAR --
SCREAMING -- NAKED -- HYSTERICAL!

SHELLY
YOU MOTHERFUCKER! YOU'RE NOT GOING
ANYWHERE! YOU BASTARD!

She's pounding on the hood and the glass.

PAUL
Whatchoo want me to do?

RICHARD
Nigga, whatchoo think? Start the
car.

Pauls the clutch, car starts going. Shelly hangs on for dear
life, pounding the hood. Screaming. People start noticing
the naked woman on the car going up the street.

PAUL
Bitch is puttin' dents in my hood,
man. You understand, I can't have
this.

RICHARD
Do what you gotta do.

Paul swerves hard. Shelly goes flying off the hood and into
some bushes. Paul checks the rearview.

PAUL
I don't see her.

Richard notices Shelly pop out of the bushes. Starts chasing
the car up the street, naked, screaming and waving her fist.

RICHARD
She's fine.

Paul guns it. Passes Richard a bottle of wine. Richard
takes a sip, sits back sighs. Watches the city give way to
the FREEWAY. Sweet freedom.

EXT. BERKELEY, CA - DAY

Various QUICK CUTS of the COUNTERCULTURE MOVEMENT. STUDENT
PROTESTS. THE HAIGHT. THE BLACK PANTHERS.

It's a hotbed of cultural change.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Richard and Paul walk through a tiny, austere apartment. Richard opens the window. Checks the view.

He can see all the STREET ACTION from here. JUNKIES and DRUNKS yelling at each other. BLACK PANTHERS walking in and out of one of their CHAPTERS. Turns to Paul.

RICHARD

This'll work.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Richard hangs out on the corner, watches an OLD WINO yell at a JUNKIE TRYING TO DIRECT TRAFFIC IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STREET. The Wino shows genuine concern for the brother.

He stops one of the Panthers walking in front of him.

WINO

Hey, youngblood. That boy gon' get hisself killed.

The Panther runs out in the middle of the street, holds out his hand to stop traffic. GENTLY LEADS THE JUNKIE TO THE CURB. Richard is fascinated by this simple human gesture.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

Richard writes in a book. Sits up, looks around at all the FREAKS & WEIRDOS. One of them is sitting there MAKING STRANGE NOISES. Richard watches intently. Fascinated.

INT. BASIN STREET WEST - NIGHT

A comedy club. Richard's on stage for a small crowd. He MAKES BIZARRE ANIMAL NOISES to the confusion of the crowd.

Paul sits in the audience, perplexed. Richard finally notices their faces. The distaste.

RICHARD

S'just what I felt like doin' tonight.

INT. BLACK PANTHER CHAPTER - DAY

Richard and Paul stand in the back, behind FILLED UP CHAIRS, listening to an enlightened SISTER talk about the struggle.

INT. BASIN STREET WEST - NIGHT

Richard's on stage for a small house.

RICHARD
Nigger. Nigguh.
Niggerniggerniggernigger. NIGGA!

He keeps doing this. Varying his reading of it. Paul watches from the audience. Fascinated.

INT. USED BOOKSTORE - DAY

Richard combs the racks. Finds THE COLLECTED SPEECHES OF MALCOLM X. Pulls it off the shelf.

EXT. GOLDEN GATE PARK - DAY

Richard reads the book. Underlines relevant passages.

INT. PARTY - NIGHT

Paul introduces Richard to a group of young black men; CECIL BROWN, CLAUDE BROWN, ISHMAEL REED.

PAUL
Rich, this is Cecil Brown, Ishmael
Read...

A young white girl, CASEY, pushes her way in.

CASEY
I'm Casey. Casey de la Vega.

JUMP CUT TO:

PARTY - LATER

The party has died down. Mellow. Ishamel holds court with Casey all the brothers telling a story. They're all riveted.

ISHMAEL

... and when I talk about
Necrodoicism, I'm trying to put
forward the idea that any kind of
deep immersion in blackness is at
the same time an immersion into
Americanness given the extent to
which, because of slavery and what
it has wrought, Africa played in
the making of America.

Casey looks over at Richard, listening intently. She smiles.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

Richard walks in, looks around. All black people on line.
Watches a YOUNG BROTHER at a window, pleading for help.

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - SAME

The Young Brother Richard was watching steps outside, head
hung low, dejected. Richard walks up to him.

RICHARD

Wha's happenin', brother? Don't
mean to creep up on you, but...

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER

A GREASY SPOON. Inside, the Young Brother eats ravenously
and talks excitedly as Richard listens intently.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Richard and Paul help the Panthers serve breakfast to poor
black families.

INT. MANDRAKES - NIGHT

Richard's addresses a big audience.

RICHARD

I learned when I was a kid that
black people didn't have a god,
y'know, 'cause we worshipped things
like air, water, trees, each other.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

And it was considered pretty savage by the white man, 'cause he said, "Why worship those things, silly savage, when you can worship me, the white man? Here take these beads and cool it." And when I say white man, I don't mean everybody.

(to WHITE GUY in the audience)

You know who you are.

Laughter. He catches Casey's eye in the audience. Winks.

WHITE GUY

Yer lucky I have a sense of humor.

RICHARD

I'm lucky you have, too, 'cause I know what you people do to us.

WHITE GUY

(jocular)

That's right.

Laughter. Richard's about to go on, thinks, stops.

RICHARD

Can I ask you, why you all afraid of Black Power? Why? You seem to be a spokesman for the bigot group.

(off their laughter)

I mean, black power is just words.

White people get so uptight.

"Black Power's coming, Black Power's coming." They have it on television, and everybody just, they really get uptight. But the White Knight comes stickin' people, tha's cool?

(laughter)

Anyway, you have nothin' to fear from the black man except his thoughts.

(beat; menacing voice)

And that's enough.

INT. RICHARD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Richard writes by CANDLELIGHT. LISTS OF NEW ROUTINES. Marvin Gaye's *What's Happening Brother* spins on the record player.

He looks out the window, see the WINO on the street staring at the JUNKIE, staggering around. They yell at each other.

WINO

Boy, get outta the street. You gon' get your ass run over. Get yourself cleaned up.

JUNKIE

Can't you see I'm sick, motherfucker?

The argument continues. Richard watches Casey, sleeping in his bed. He starts to pull the window shut. Stops just shy of all the way down. Catches his reflection in the window, and HEARS A FAMILIAR VOICE IN HIS HEAD.

MAMA (V.O.)

How much weight... how much goddamn responsibility you think a skinny li'l nigga like you can carry on his back?

Thinks a moment, then -- PULLS IT OPEN AGAIN. All the way. Stares out at them. Let them argue. Let me hear them. Let it in. Let it all in.

Turns to his Pad. At the bottom of new routines, he writes "WINO & THE JUNKIE."

INT. THE IMPROV - NY - 1971 - NIGHT

An intimate comedy club. The audience files in slowly, anticipation in the air. A mixed crowd -- lots of black, lots of white. All looking to laugh.

Super:

The Improv
New York City
First Filmed Performance

Richard's Manager, RON, buzzes around the CAMERA EQUIPMENT in the back of the room as the CAMERAMAN does his work.

RON

Make sure you get clear site lines.

Casey walks up to Paul, sitting at a table. Sits.

PAUL

How's he doin'?

CASEY
He's nervous.

INT. IMPROV - DRESSING ROOM - SAME

Paul walks in on a meditative Richard, contemplating several lines of cocaine laid out on a mirror beneath him. Richard looks up at Paul with uncertain eyes.

PAUL
(re: lines of coke)
They ain't goin' nowhere.

RICHARD
I'm shakin'. It's the camera. I
feel like I'm not --

PAUL
Uh-uh. Save it for the stage, man.
Say it all out there.

INT. THE IMPROV - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

The MC's VOICE booms over the loudspeaker.

MC
And now, the Improv is proud to
welcome to the stage... Richard
Pryor.

Camera rolling, full audience, Richard shuffles out to
healthy applause. Looks nervous.

RICHARD
I'm very happy to be here. Very
happy to be on film. I'm really...
uh, nervous, 'cause I ain't had no
cocaine all day. Love cocaine.

Titters from the audience, but Richard is way too nervous and
it shows. Casey looks at Paul, concerned. Paul puts his
hand up as if to say, 'Let him get settled.'

RICHARD
I don't know what I'm gonna talk
about, but I have a list.
(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

I imagine a lot 'a y'all will be leaving during my shit, but that's cool too, 'cause that should be in the film, and uh, I hope I'm funny and shit, 'cause just to be a nigga standin' up here, just sayin' nothin'... that ain't shit. So I hope I'm funny...

He's rambling. Ron puts his head in his hands.

RICHARD

I always wanted to be something other than a nigga, 'cause niggas had it so rough. I tried to be a black cat with neat hair. I always thought, 'If my hair was straight, than whitey'd dig me.' So I got it processed. Wrong.

(off titters)

And, uh, I lived in a neighborhood, a lotta liquor stores and whorehouses, 'cause niggas love to drink. Or so they say...

Ron watches the crowd with concern. They're listening, but not much laughter. Some are following him, some need proof.

DISSOLVE TO:

STAGE - LATER

Richard's act continues. Scattered laughter throughout.

RICHARD

I like white women, though. Got the white woman disease. 'Specially with them great big titties, and it's great cumming, but white folks come too quiet. They be like --

Acts it out. The whites in the audience aren't too into it.

RICHARD

But niggas make noise when they cummin'.

Acts it out. Suddenly notices and gets distracted by the camera in back. Smiles and waves at it.

RICHARD

Damn. Gettin' filmed is a drag,
y'know, 'cause I'm nervous, and I
don't wanna be nervous, 'cause, you
know, I ain't lyin'....

He goes to light a cigarette. Takes a moment. Sees the
faces in the audience. A mix of anticipation and pity.

RICHARD

Okay, you know what, let's pretend
like the lights are out and there
ain't no cameras and none 'a that
shit, you dig? 'Cause then I can
get down. I gotta tell that to
myself, 'cause you all don't give a
fuck one way or the other...

(white Voice)

So what if there's no camera?
You're just not funny, Dickie.

(beat)

Okay. Any requests?

He's sinking and the feeling in the audience is palpable. A
COUPLE in the audience gets up and exits toward the back.

RICHARD

Oh, okay... 'bye-bye. See? I hate
to see folks leave while I be
talkin'. Hope y'all get raped by
black folks with clap. Ain't
nothin' worse than the black clap..

CLOSE on RICHARD'S FACE. He continues his act, but in his
mind, an interior monologue.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Get your shit together, nigga.
Look at Ron. Paul. Casey. All
these people. They all feel sorry
for you. You ain't nothin' but a
third rate black Lenny Bruce. They
figured your shit out, and now they
all sittin' there wonderin' why
they didn't stay home and watch the
Odd Couple.

Watches the people in the audience. Many of them look
restless. He looks down at his list. Comes to WINO PREACHER
& WILLIE THE JUNKIE at the bottom of the page.

RICHARD (V.O.)

Give it to 'em Rich. Don't waste no more time now. You didn't spend all those years takin' shit for nothin'. You seen what it's like out there. Now show them, nigga. They need to know wha's goin' on outside they own world. Ain't the time to be scared no more. Give these motherfuckers some truth.

Something in his eyes. A determination. He stops talking to the audience. Exhales. Takes a moment, and --

RICHARD

I remember I couldn't --
(false start; takes a moment, then)

I'd see 'em 'cause they was always around, but I could never hang with the Winos, you know? 'Cause they knew Jesus personally. They be like...

He pantomimes drinking from a Screwcap Wine Bottle.

RICHARD

(Wino voice)

Man, I know Jesus. Live over there in the projects. Boy ain't shit. Like that boy over there. See that boy over there in the streets? Used to be a genius. Boy used to book the numbers, didn't need paper or pencil. Now that nigga can't remember his shoelace.

(calls to him)

Get out the street, boy. Before you get run over, boy, get out the way. Willie, move out the street, man...

Suddenly, he changes characters. Becomes Willie the Junkie. Strung out, jittery, the same Richard, but somehow he's gone from an old Wino into this messed up kid, brilliantly.

RICHARD

(as Willie)

Wha's hapnin'? Motherfucker... shit... I see you old motherfucker. Ha, ha. Ah, man, motherfuck these cars. I'm directing this shit...

Flails his arms as if directing traffic. Starts scratching himself -- the junkie itch.

RICHARD

(as Willie)

Say, man, I feel bad enough to drink some milk. You got anything?

(as Wino)

Yeah, boy, I got something. I got some advice for yo' ass. You better lay off that narcotic, nigga. It done made you null and void. You better try to go to work, get a job, be somebody respectable. Fuckin' around out here in the streets like a fool. You could help the community. You better get it together.

Changes back to Willie, mocking the old Wino.

RICHARD

(as Willie; mocking)

'You better get it together.'
Shit... wha's hapnin'?

Long stretch of silence as Richard goes deep inside as Willie. A hopelessness behind his eyes. It's tender, poignant. The whole audience leans forward in their seats.

RICHARD

(as Willie)

I used to work, motherfucker. I worked for five years in a row when I was in the joint... pressing license plates. Where the fuck a nigga gon' get a job out here in the street pressin' license plates, man? You don' understand --

He puts his head in his hand and cries. Real tears. The pain, the struggle, the agony Willie has felt. It's all coming out. He's mesmerizing. And the audience is riveted.

RICHARD

(Willie crying)

Kiss my motherfuckin' ass, nigga.
Or kill me, motherfucker. I went down to the unemployment bureau, baby, you dig? Tha's right.
Walked in the office, talkin' bout -

(white Voice)

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Good afternoon, I'm applying for a job, and I was wondering if you could help me.

(back to Willie)

Freaked the bitch out.

The audience laughs. They're on an emotional roller-coaster now and Richard's driving.

RICHARD

(Willie)

Bitch be talkin', "Oooo, what have you done before"? Everything, motherfucker. I said, I gotta fill out all this shit to get a job? Motherfuck a job. Shit, I'd rather be highhhhhhh...

(as the Wino)

Well, we all gon' get high today, boy. Can you get high off some 'a this, nigga? Try some 'a that.

Holds out his bottle of wine. Pulls it back.

RICHARD

(as Wino)

No, you can't have none 'a this now, you gon' tremble, nigga. What's wrong with you?

(Willie)

I'm sick, motherfucker. I ain't had no shit, man. That brother, the nigga told me I got to have some money to get some dope? I did sixty days for that nigga. And the motherfucker saw me in the street, man, I was sick in the street and needed jus' a little bit 'a dope. Jus' shoot me up and I be cool, 'cause he the nigga turned me on, man. Told me it was cocaine, baby. Said ain't gonna fuck with you, little cocaine, it be cool. You dig? Then the motherfucker shot me up with some big boy, and then...

Willie starts crying again.

In the back, Ron looks around. Notices people in the audience tearing up, sniffing, feeling Willie's pain. A MAN in the back burns himself with his cigarette, riveted to the stage. Ron can't believe what he's seeing.

RICHARD

(Willie)

My mama called me a dog... my mama,
mother dear, called me a dog.

Paul and Casey are as visibly blown away as the rest of the crowd. Something's happening here. Something new.

RICHARD

(Willie)

My daddy told me he don't wanna see
me in the vicinity, jus' 'cause I
stole his television. And I'm sick
man, I need some help. I need
somebody to walk with me and talk
with me 'til two o'clock tomorrow
afternoon when I can get some shit.
I'll be alright, I can handle this
white world then, baby.

PAUL

(quietly; to himself)

Preach, nigga, preach.

RICHARD

(Willie)

I get a little shit in my vein, I
can take all the shit, know wha'
mean? I can take it, man. 'Cause
my mind think about all this shit I
don' wanna think about. But... if
you hang with me you old wine-
drinkin', motherfucker... you
willin' to do that for me, man?

People stare mouth agape at this BRILLIANT PIECE OF SOCIAL
THEATER. Richard becomes the Wino, thinking, contemplative.

RICHARD

(Wino)

I'm gon' do it witcha, boy. I'm
gon' walk witcha, 'cause I believe
you got potential. You could be
somebody with a little opportunity
like I had back in 1905. I went
down to Mexico City, 'cause that's
the only place a nigga could go
enjoy hisself without prejudice...
I... come on now, walk with me
boy... like I was sayin'...

Richard heads off the stage, arm around the imaginary Willie, continuing his words of wisdom. He's gone. A moment of silence and then... deafening applause.

INT. IMPROV - LATER

Quick cuts as Ron searches for Richard. Hears people raving about what they've just seen.

EXT. IMPROV - BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Richard crouches by the dumpster, throwing up. Expunging. Collapses into Casey against the brick wall. Paul watches them from a safe distance, as Ron comes busting out from inside. Tries to approach, but Paul stops him.

PAUL

Let him be.

RON

He was fuckin' brilliant tonight. You oughta hear 'em in there. They never saw anything like it. Why's he acting like someone died?

PAUL

Someone did.

They watch from a comfortable distance as Richard sobs into Casey, letting it out. Breaking through. Once and for all.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RICHARD'S HOUSE - PATIO/POOLSIDE - 2005 - DAY

QUICK CUTS of Jennifer on the patio, digging through STACKS OF LEGAL AND MEDICAL PAPERWORK, pacing and arguing into the telephone. Looks harried, but steadfast and determined as she boldly takes care of business.

She frequently glances up at Richard watching Stand-up in the living room, through the sliding glass door.

JENNIFER

(heated; into phone)

... all the early LAFF records stuff... we litigated this years ago, but the son of the producer -- something Drozen, I'll dig it up -- went and sold them anyway...

(MORE)

JENNIFER (cont'd)
that is Richard's property, and
yes, sue the motherfucker... sue,
sue...

JUMP CUT:

JENNIFER
... hold on. When I came back
eleven years ago, why was he paying
\$60,000 worth of legal bills a
month when he was on an IV drip in
bed? Oh wait, I know. Because
supposedly smarter people than me
gave away the fucking farm...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

CLOSE on RICHARD as the outside sound of Jennifer's arguing
fights with the noise of the T.V. Though there are no
obvious outward signs, there's a sense that Richard hears her
working on his behalf.

JENNIFER (O.S.)
(all business)
... something was missed because
there's a discrepancy between
Rhino's numbers and Richard's
actual mechanical royalties. The
third quarter royalty is short...
It's not that I don't trust you,
it's just that you're all a bunch
of liars, crooks and thieves...

Is that the crease of a smile at the corner of his lips?

EXT. PATIO - SAME

Jennifer continues into the phone.

JENNIFER
... I threw her out because she
started screaming at me in front of
Richard... "I can come here when
and how I want to see my father"...
That kind of drama is not good for
him, and I'm sorry, but she
can't... You tell her we have daily
medical modalities we have to
adhere to... doctors appointments,
therapists coming to the house. I
made it clear we have a schedule
which they have to work within.
(MORE)

JENNIFER (cont'd)

And this keeps their father healthy. It didn't come from me. Richard and his shrink decided the terms of visitation which they put in place to reduce stress...

JUMP CUT:

Jennifer is off the phone. Looks like she's been through the ringer. Stressed and spent. She sifts through then throws aside the piles of paperwork left undone.

Glances at Richard inside, being tended to by Carmen.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Jennifer walks in. Starts for Richard, then stops. Turns away. She's conflicted. Wrestling with her own mind.

Looking unsure, she finally heads for him. Takes the washcloth from Carmen.

JENNIFER

Give us a minute?

Carmen nods, walks off. Jennifer sits close, dabs at Richard's mouth.

JENNIFER

It's a shit storm, Richard. They're fucking with me so hard lately. The ex-wives, the kids, the lawyers... It's all I can do to stop them from taking every last thing you worked your whole life for. Doesn't matter to any of them you asked me to come back. When you could still walk around, tell motherfuckers off, you called me home, remember? Asked me to take care of everything. To stop all the vultures from picking you clean. To take care of you. And they've never forgiven me for keeping you alive.

(breaking down)

Tell me what to do. Give me something, Richard. A word. A sound. Tell me you're with me. I need your strength now.

She stares in his eyes. They're distant, cold. Seem to be looking defiantly away, as if saying 'Handle it your damn self.' The sympathy she seeks is just not there.

She nods. Wipes away her tears. Gets up and turns away.

As she walks off, she catches sight of a mirror and notices Richard's reflection behind her -- HIS EYES --

HIS EYES ARE FOLLOWING HER -- SYMPATHETIC AND SAD -- they seem to say 'If only there was something I could do for you.'

She turns in expectation, but again -- HIS EYES HAVE TURNED HARD IN DEFIANCE. Evidence of his dual nature even now.

She laughs despite herself, nods at the familiar Richard that sits before her. At the upward tilt of his chin. At the "proud swagger" displayed in the way his body has frozen.

Nothing has changed but his health. And clearly she takes some comfort in that.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INNER CITY STREETS - 1974 - DAY

The Ghetto. Richard swaggers up the block with effortless cool. Stands taller, with newfound confidence and ease. Several FANS run up to slap him five. INTERCUT WITH --

The VOICE of a MALE INTERVIEWER heard over QUICK CUTS -- Still Photos, Script Covers, Grainy Documentary Footage, and Movie Posters -- of all the things he mentions.

INTERVIEWER (V.O.)

... last couple years have been busy ones for Richard Pryor to say the least. You branched out from the stage to the writer's room, penning scripts for Sanford and Son, The Flip Wilson Show, you won an Emmy for the Lily Tomlin Special. Performed for a huge, predominantly black audience at the Wattstax festival. Appeared in several films -- *Lady Sings the Blues, Hit!, The Mack* -- all tremendously successful in the, uh, black community...

INT. DINER - DAY

A greasy spoon. The INTERVIEWER, male, 20s, and Richard sit at a booth by the window, looking out on urban decay. The Interviewer takes notes as a TAPE RECORDER rolls.

INTERVIEWER

... and now the Comedy Album, which you just learned was nominated for a Grammy Award. Congratulations.

RICHARD

Thank you.

INTERVIEWER

You've had all this visibility in a relatively short period of time, and yet mainstream acceptance or what you might call crossover success continues to... elude you --

RICHARD

Mainstream? You mean white folks.

The Interviewer shifts uncomfortably at being caught making the racist euphemism.

INTERVIEWER

Well, fact is no black comic has ever successfully appealed to a substantially mixed audience. If anything, history's proven it's an either/or proposition.

Richard is clearly disturbed by this.

RICHARD

Look, I wanna be accepted, okay? But usually in order to be accepted by white people, you have to compromise from your hello, so...

INTERVIEWER

Only reason I ask is I've heard you referred to lately as a black folk hero or a black cultural hero. Do you think that is your role now?

Richard lights a smoke, looks at the black folks rushing about their daily lives. Notices some WHITE COPS cruising the streets with suspicion. Considers the question...

INT. COMEDY CLUB - NIGHT

Richard performs for a packed all black house who shout out their raucous agreement with everything he says.

RICHARD

Cops put a hurtin' on your ass,
man, they really degrade you.
White folks don't believe that
shit.

(White Voice)

Oh, c'mon, those beatings, those
people were resisting arrest. I'm
tired of this harassment of police
officers.

(Richard)

'Cause the police live in your
neighborhood, see, and you be
knowin' 'em as Officer Timson.

(White Voice)

Hello, Officer Timson, nice Pinto
y'have. See you on the golf course.

(Richard)

See, niggas don't know 'em like
that. White folks get a ticket,
they pull over, be like --

(White Voice)

Hey, Officer, glad to be of help.

(Richard)

Nigga got to be like --

EXT. TENEMENT - FIRE ESCAPE - DAY

Several BLACK MEN, 20s, hang out -- one in the window, four
on the fire escape -- and YELL THE PUNCHLINE as they listen
along with the RECORD PLAYER on the windowsill.

ALL

I - AM - REACHING - INTO - MY -
POCKET - FOR MY - LICENSE...

They collapse in laughter. Next to the Player sits Richard's
record *THAT NIGGER'S CRAZY*. OFF SPINNING RECORD CUT TO --

EXT./INT. INNER CITY - DAY & NIGHT

QUICK VIGNETTES of BLACK MEN & WOMEN alternating between the
COMPROMISE OF WORKING IN THE WHITE WORLD and grooving to the
truth of *THAT NIGGER'S CRAZY* in their downtime.

Clearly A BLACK CULTURAL HERO HAS EMERGED.

INT. DISCOTEQUE - 1975 - NIGHT

Richard struts through the club with assorted FRIENDS and HANGERS-ON. He smokes, drinks, snorts, laughs, dances and fools around with a VARIETY OF WOMEN.

These are high times for Richard Pryor. It's pure 70s DISCO DEBAUCHERY and life's a party.

INT. DISCOTEQUE - LATER

As the night winds down, from a table, Richard glances over at the DANCE FLOOR and spots DEBORAH, black, 20s, gorgeous and knows it, dancing alone but surrounded by admiring MEN.

TIME STOPS. He SOAKS IN HER BEAUTY. Looks her up and down. Her designer clothes, bejeweled neck, wrist, ears. All the men dancing up on her. The desperation in their eyes.

She could care less. Dances with her nose in the air. Clearly knows how to use her power over them. Knows they all want her. Would do anything to possess her.

And by his drunk, smitten look, Richard is no exception. Suddenly, she glances over. *They lock eyes knowingly.*

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO BACKLOT - TRAILER - DAY

Richard and Deborah go at it in the tiny space. Both sweaty and vocal in their lust, calling out each other's names.

EXT. TRAILER - SAME

A FEMALE PRODUCTION ASSISTANT, 20s, walks up to the trailer door, earpiece on. Starts to knock, but hears VERY HOT SEX coming from inside. She blinks away, squeamish.

EXT. STUDIO BACKLOT - DAY

Richard and Deborah walk past enormous SOUNDSTAGES. They pass film sets, CREWMEMBERS, MARTIANS, SHOWGIRLS, 50s GREASERS and other ACTORS IN COSTUME. He tucks his wardrobe in. She's unruffled, sexy as ever.

DEBORAH

You see my new bag? It's a Judith Lieber.

She holds it up for his inspection, proudly.

RICHARD

(grumpy)

What'd that cost me? Didn't I just buy you that goddamn jade necklace?

DEBORAH

That was s'posed to be a gift. What, you gonna hold it against me now?

RICHARD

Bitch, you run some game. You sure you ain't a pro?

DEBORAH

What's wrong with you?

Richard holds up his script.

RICHARD

I gotta say this step 'n fetchit bullshit, that's what's wrong.

DEBORAH

Why do it then, Mr. Voice of Black America, social conscience of his people? It's not like you need it.

He glares at her in warning. She turns away.

RICHARD

'Cause what's the point of finding your goddamn voice... if you ain't gonna let the whole world hear it?

He chucks the script in a garbage can, as they enter a soundstage.

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

An ACTIVE FILM SET. Camera equipment and lights everywhere.

CLOSE on a FILM SLATE which reads SILVER STREAK. A TRAIN CAR SET.

Actors GENE WILDER, 40s, JILL CLAYBURGH, 30s, and PATRICK MCGOOHAN, 50s, sit around a train car table as Richard, dressed in STEWARD'S CLOTHES carries a silver pot of coffee. He looks extremely uncomfortable.

Director ARTHUR HILLER, 40s, and the CREW sit behind the camera. An ASSISTANT CAMERAMAN slates.

ARTHUR HILLER
Settle down. And... ACTION!

Richard does nothing. Stands stock still. Everyone stares at him, waiting.

ARTHUR HILLER
Richard? Action.

RICHARD (AS GROVER)
Is she with you, sir? Boy, she is... beautiful. She... hmm...

Richard stops, exhales. Looks despondent.

ARTHUR HILLER
You need a line?

RICHARD
(beat; frustrated)
Arthur, man, black people don't talk like this.

GENE
(jocular)
And what makes you the authority?

RICHARD
My dick. C'mon, Gene, 'Boy oh boy, she's beautiful.' You know?

ARTHUR HILLER
Okay, so... what? You wanna try something?

Richard thinks about this.

CUT TO:

Camera rolls.

ARTHUR HILLER
Action!

Richard takes a moment of serious contemplation. They all wait for him. Watch him. Anticipating. What'll he do? Then all of a sudden, he's straight up jiving.

RICHARD (AS GROVER)
Izzat your lady, man? She
somethin' else. Stand up, mama.
Lemme get a look atcha.

Arthur nods behind the camera. Better. More real. The SCRIPT SUPERVISOR sidles up to him. Whispers.

SCRIPT SUPERVISOR
Not in the script.

He waves her away. Richard stares at Jill and riffs.

RICHARD (AS GROVER)
Mm-mm-mm, look so fine, make me
wanna slap my mama. Get all down
in ya lap, slop ya up like a cat
with a bowl 'a milk. Have mercy.

Everyone on set including the cast struggles not to laugh.

PATRICK (AS ROGER)
Steward, you may go, thank you.

RICHARD (AS GROVER)
Can I help you, sir, with just a
little more coffee? Half a cup --

Richard dumps coffee in his lap.

PATRICK (AS ROGER)
Get out you ignorant NIGGER!

Richard pulls a gun on him, fury in his eyes.

RICHARD (GROVER)
Say, who you callin' nigga, huh?
You don't know me well enough to
call me no nigga. I'll slap the
taste outcha mouth.

The Script Supervisor throws up her hands in defeat.

RICHARD (GROVER)
You don't even know my name. I'll
beat the white off your ass.
Honky, motherfucker. Oughta slap
you upside the head with my dick.

ARTHUR HILLER

Cut.

The cast and crew bust up laughing and applauding.

Richard snaps out of his trance, looks over at Deborah standing near the crew who's joined in the applause. She smiles and nods at him. You did it. Richard smile, triumphantly. Basks in their approval.

O.C AUDIENCE LAUGHTER brings us into the --

INT. FOX VILLAGE THEATER - SAME

-- where the FULL INDUSTRY AUDIENCE cracks up at the film's PREMIERE. ON SCREEN Gene Wilder in FULL BLACKFACE attempts to jive as Richard eggs him on.

In the audience, Richard laughs along with everyone, enjoying himself. Deborah squeezes his hand in support.

RICHARD (GROVER)

When you step outta here, you gotta
step out like King Shit. You bad.
Put this radio to your ear and just
move to the music. Try it.

On screen, Gene tries to walk like a black man. The crowd cracks up. Richard watches them laugh. Seems pleased.

CLOSE ON RICHARD. Suddenly, the laughter is drowned out by a FAMILIAR VOICE IN HIS HEAD. Scolds him.

MAMA (V.O.)

Blackface. You oughta be ashamed
'a yo'self. What the white folks
used to do to keep niggas off the
stage. Mmm-mm-mmm.

Rubs his head to shake out the voice, and the NATURAL SOUNDS OF THE THEATER return. Stares up at the screen.

RICHARD (GROVER)

Stop. How come all you whiteys got
such a tight ass, man?

AUDIENCE ROARS. Richard looks around. Sees Redd, Paul, Deborah laughing their asses off. Their orgasmic faces appear distorted to him. Grotesque in their approval.

He pries his hand out of Deborah's in disgust. Gets up, heads up the aisle.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Richard bursts in. It's empty. Leans over a sink trying to get a handle on himself. Stares into the mirror. Splashes some water on his face, and hears MAMA'S VOICE.

MAMA (V.O.)

You committin' the worst sin of all. Hypocrisy.

Richard looks up. The mirror has become a WINDOW INTO A COURTROOM where YOUNG RICHARD, 10, sits on the stand next to a JUDGE. Young Richard stares out at MAMA MARIE sitting at one table and his BIRTH MOTHER, 20s, at another.

Mama Marie scolds Young Richard from across the room.

MAMA

Talkin' 'bout equality one day,
makin' money off the black man's
shame the next.

YOUNG RICHARD

(pleading)

But Mama, they say it's gon' open a
lotta doors.

Two more voices chime in from the back of the courtroom --
UNCLE DICKIE & AUNT DEE.

UNCLE DICKIE

Yeah, you keep tellin' yo'self
that.

AUNT DEE

Fact is, baby, you ain't nothin' to
them but the nigga of the month.

RICHARD

Why can't you lemme enjoy this?
For once.

MAMA

The life you have was built on the
backs 'a all the niggas who ever
suffered. You wanna enjoy it?
It's enough you get to live it,
boy. You got to always remember
where you came from.

This rocks Richard to the core. The Judge turns to Young Richard.

JUDGE

Time to make a choice, son. Who's
it gonna be?

Young Richard looks at his Birth Mother who whimpers. Mama Marie just stares at him with a piercing gaze. Daring him.

The real Richard watches the scene through the mirror with mounting anger. AMORPHOUS WHISPERS FILL HIS HEAD.

RICHARD

(whispers)

... get out 'a my head...

(yells)

GET THE FUCK OUT MY HEAD!

He BASHES HIS HEAD INTO THE MIRROR which CRACKS DOWN THE MIDDLE. It's just a mirror, once again. As blood trickles down his forehead, Richard stares at the SHARPLY SPLIT IMAGE OF HIMSELF -- one side clear, one side distorted.

REDD (O.S.)

I don't know who you're talkin' to,
son...

Richard turns, see Redd standing there, staring kindly.

REDD

... but you tell 'em.

Richard turns back to the split, distorted image of his two selves, tears in his eyes. Puts his hand on the mirror between them. *Will this shattered, divided man ever be whole?*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAN FERNANDO VALLEY - CAR - DAY

A young JENNIFER LEE, white, late 20s, a demure and dark-haired beauty, half-seen in a passenger side mirror, stares at her rural surroundings as LUCY, 20s, white and hyper, drives and expounds.

LUCY

... officially I'm on the payroll as a "creative consultant", but he depends on me for so much more. It was me who got him that good role in Blue Collar 'cause, y'know, I'm tight with Paul Schrader and I really thought he should get noticed as a serious actor.

(MORE)

LUCY (cont'd)

And not just 'cause we had a thing,
which we don't anymore, although
you never know with him. But
really I'm just helping fix up the
house, interior decorating...

She rambles on. They come to a GATE which opens leading them
up the long, CIRCULAR DRIVEWAY. Jennifer stares out in
wonder at the decrepit SPANISH-STYLE ESTATE. Trees that need
pruning, grass that needs mowing, cracks in the walls.

EXT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - THE GROUNDS - SAME

They walk across the grounds. Jennifer takes it all in. The
dying roses in the backyard. The tennis court with a torn,
sagging net and rotting bleachers, the scum-filled pool with
a dead mouse floating. It feels ghostly and abandoned.

LUCY

He was able to get a great price
considering the acreage. But it
needs a lot of work.

INT. ESTATE - LIVING ROOM - SAME

Jennifer follows Lucy inside. WORKMEN plaster, hammer and
paint the torn up house tirelessly. Lucy goes over to give
them instruction.

Jennifer walks around, checking out the GOLD RECORDS,
GRAMMYS, MOVIE POSTERS and PHOTOS OF RICHARD and OTHER
CELEBRITIES strewn haphazardly. All the TROPHIES OF
RICHARD'S SUCCESS.

MERCY, late 30s, Salvadorian, small and round, bursts into
the room. Heads over to Lucy and yells at a WORKER in
furious Spanish. He slinks off. Lucy beckons Jennifer over.

LUCY

Jennifer, this is Mercy, Richard's
housekeeper. She keeps this whole
place running. Without her the
walls would fall around our ears.

Mercy glows at the compliment. They exchange pleasantries.

MERCY

Meester Richard is in the backyard
with peoples making business.

EXT. ESTATE - BACKYARD - DAY

Richard, Paul and DAVID FRANKLIN, late 30s, Richard's new manager sit across from DICK EBERSOL, 40s, as Mercy walks out, sets down a bowl of fruit. They pick.

EBERSOL

The Richard Pryor Comedy and Variety hour.

RICHARD

I don't know, Dick. Sounds like some Sonny and Cher bullshit.

EBERSOL

Call it whatever you want. Point is, it'll be your show. Skits, music, anything you want to do.

PAUL

Define 'anything'?

EBERSOL

We run everything by Standards and Practices, but barring cursing or nudity you shouldn't have any problem.

(leans forward; serious)

We want you in the NBC family, Rich. For you, we're willing to test a few boundaries.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

David and Dick walk in chatting, followed by Richard and Paul. Richard's eyes immediately fall on Jennifer.

RICHARD

(to Dick)

'Scuse me. I'll meet y'all outside. Don't leave, okay? Lucy.

They exit as Richard walks up to Lucy and Jennifer.

LUCY

Richard, this is Jennifer. She'll be helping me fix up the house.

RICHARD

Welcome. Jennifer.

JENNIFER
Thanks. Richard.

They shake hands and lock eyes. Instant chemistry.

RICHARD
You'll let me know if you need
anything while you're here.

EXT. ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

David Franklin, Paul and Dick converse by Dick's car.
Richard walks out of the house, heads over to them with a
slightly glazed look in his eyes.

RICHARD
Thanks for comin' all the way out,
Dick.

EBERSOL
Don't make me wait too long, okay?
Listen to your manager.

They all shake hands. Dick gets in his car, drives off.
Passes ANOTHER CAR coming up the driveway.

RICHARD
I'm gettin' solid movie offers now,
Greased Lightning's comin' out.
What do I wanna go back to T.V for?

PAUL
You write Greased Lightning? That
ain't your voice, nigga. Think
about it.

DAVID FRANKLIN
Plus, a good chunk of mainstream
America still doesn't know who you
are. And a movie about the first
black NASCAR driver probably won't
change that, starring role or not.

PAUL
Twenty to fifty million people a
week's a lotta minds to fuck with.

RICHARD
I don't wanna fuck with 'em. I
wanna open 'em.

The CAR stops. Deborah gets out. Richard glares at her.

DEBORAH

Boys.

RICHARD

Where you been all day, Deborah?

She pulls SHOPPING BAGS from the back seat. HIGH END DESIGNER STORES. Holds them up. Smiles sarcastically.

Both David and Paul notice several telltale BRUISES on her, despite what were obvious efforts to cover them up. They say nothing. Richard looks her up and down with suspicion.

RICHARD

Why's your dress all creased up?

DEBORAH

I was trying on clothes all day.
Do the math, Columbo.

She struts up to the entrance like a rich, bored Beverly Hills wife. Heads inside the house.

PAUL

She gon' put you in the poor house,
nigga.

RICHARD

Tha's my lady, man. Mind your
business.

Richard watches her through the window, suspiciously, as she heads through the living room handing her bags off to Mercy. She passes Lucy and Jennifer and heads out of sight. His focus falls on Jennifer.

DAVID FRANKLIN

So what're you thinking, Rich?
About the show?

PAUL

This is what you worked for. This
opportunity right here. A chance
to reach that mainstream audience
on your terms. You gonna pass that
up? Imagine the possibilities.

Richard watches Jennifer through the window. She catches his eye. Both smile at one another. *Imagine the possibilities.* On all fronts, gleam in his eye, Richard is doing just that.

INT. TELEVISION CITY STUDIOS - DAY

A T.V SOUNDSTAGE. CLOSE ON RICHARD looking into camera.

RICHARD

Hello, my name is Richard Pryor,
and I wanted to take this
opportunity to say how thrilled I
am that NBC's given me my own show.
There've been a lot of things
written about me lately. And
people ask, "How can you have a
prime time T.V show? You'll have
to compromise."

The camera pulls back revealing RICHARD IN A NUDE BODY
STOCKING WITH HIS BALLS CUT OFF.

RICHARD

Well, look at me. I've given up
absolutely nothing.

The STUDIO AUDIENCE EXPLODES IN LAUGHTER.

INT. TELEVISION CITY STUDIOS - HALLWAY - DAY

Richard, tissue sticking out of his collar, rages at David
Franklin as they pass posters of all the NBC shows.

RICHARD

This is some bullshit. I hired a
black manager 'cause you of all
people s'posed to get it, Dave. You
swore you were gon' fight for me.

DAVID

And I do, but Rich your intro more
than suggested nudity, it
practically showed it. This is
still NBC.

RICHARD

NBC, huh? What's that stand for?
Nigga Better Compromise?

DAVID

Well, it'll never air as is --
network dollars, network rules.
What am I supposed to do?

INT. WARDROBE - SAME

They burst in. Richard starts changing into the costume of a HEAVY METAL ROCK STAR.

RICHARD

What am I supposed to do? Ten shows with my hands tied? Fuck that. First thing, you go cut my contract down to a handful --

DAVID

Let's not get crazy --

Richard whirls on him in quiet fury.

RICHARD

You ain't seen crazy, nigga. 'Cause I swear to Jesus, Allah, and the Almighty Dollah, I gotta deal with these scissor-happy motherfuckers every week I will blow my brains out.

INT. STAGE - DAY

BLACK DEATH SKETCH -- Richard, fronting a KISS-type rock band, throws drugs and pills to an all white audience which in turn gobbles them up, sedating them --

INT. NBC - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Dick Ebersol and a long table of buttoned-down NBC EXECS watch the Black Death sketch on a monitor. They stare in slack-jawed disbelief as Richard TAKES OUT A MACHINE GUN AND SHOOT THE ENTIRE WHITE AUDIENCE DEAD.

EBERSOL

Kill it.

NBC EXECUTIVE

How? There've been no specific standards violated. You approved the contract.

EBERSOL

Put it up against something everyone watches.

(MORE)

EBERSOL (cont'd)
 Whatever happens, I don't want
 people associating this show with
 our network.

(beat)
 Which slot's a graveyard?

EXT./INT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - NEW YEARS EVE

A mad New Year's Party. The HOUSE IS NOW FULLY & BEAUTIFULLY
 RENOVATED. REVELERS set off poppers, spin noisemakers,
 dance, drink and make merry all to the sound of disco music.

Super: New Years Eve, 1977

Richard dances through the house, swigging from a champagne
 bottle, greeting everyone he sees with forced exuberance.
 The life of the party.

Notices Deborah across the room, walking around with two
 FRIENDS, pointing out expensive living room fixtures,
 proudly. She catches his eye. Big tension. He ignores her.

Moves on, stops by PROPHET, black, late 20s, a POLAROID
 CAMERA around his neck, and Dirty Dick. Both admire a
 PAINTING OF CHARLIE PARKER hanging on the wall. Richard
 stares up at it in wonder.

PROPHET
 Finished it a couple days ago.
 Rashon jus' hanged it up.

Richard is touched beyond measure. Tears up.

RICHARD
 Prophet, man. Tha's really Bird.
 It's beautiful. Goddamn. C'mere.

Richard embraces him. A little too tight. Kisses his cheek.

RICHARD
 I love you, man. Thank you.

Richard notices Deborah across the room, laughing with her
 girlfriends at his display of affection. Glares at her.

DIRTY DICK
 Wha' 'bout me? I love you, too.

RICHARD
 Dirty, all you care about's I keep
 your ass in business.

DIRTY DICK

And business is good, nigga.

Looks around at all the people doing his coke. Richard suddenly notices Jennifer across the room, sitting in front of the T.V. Alone and visibly out of place.

JUMP CUT TO:

COUCH. Richard walks up, stands over Jennifer.

RICHARD

Whatchoo doin' sittin' all alone?

JENNIFER

I'm not alone. I've got Dick.

She points at DICK CLARK broadcasting from Times Square on the T.V. Richard smirks at the double entendre. He sits down by her. Starts to roll a joint.

RICHARD

You really fixed the place up nice.
The lady has impeccable taste.

JENNIFER

Long as you're comfortable in it,
I'm happy.

RICHARD

Yeah, well, I just wanted you to know I appreciate it. You put in a lot of work. And I know what it's like to put your heart and soul into something, put everything you got in a thing and have it go unappreciated, so...

She smiles warmly at his sincerity. He looks up at the T.V.

RICHARD

Lemme ask you something, Jenny Lee.
Can I call you that?

JENNIFER

Sure. I like it.

RICHARD

Good. Me, too. I don't know why,
I just like the sound of it.
Sounds old-fashioned.

(exaggerated Southern)

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
*Come on in for some Countrytime
Lemonade, Jenny Lee!*
(off her laugh)
You watch Happy Days? Or Laverne
and Shirley?

JENNIFER
Nope.

RICHARD
Well, Jenny Lee, you're the only
one in America who doesn't. They
buried my show where nobody'd ever
find it. And guess what? No one
did.
(laughs uncomfortably)
What's a nigga do when he ain't got
no fight left in him?

JENNIFER
Live to fight another day.

He looks up at her -- it's a powerful moment between them.
Jennifer pops up, nervously.

JENNIFER
Uh, you want another drink?

RICHARD
I'm'unna fire up this joint. Smoke
it with me when you get back?

She smiles, starts to head off.

RICHARD
Jenny Lee.
(she turns)
I like talkin' to you. I don't
know why, s'just like... I feel
like I can tell you anything.

JENNIFER
Don't roll it too tight.

She heads off. Richard pulls out papers, finishes rolling,
looks up and notices Deborah and her friends talking and
flirting across the room with several touchy-feely MEN.

He focuses on the body contact. Her hands on theirs. Their
hands on her body. He burns.

JUMP CUT TO:

ACROSS THE ROOM. Richard storms up to Deborah, grips her arm violently and pulls her away from everyone.

RICHARD
You tryin' to make a fool outta me?

DEBORAH
You just did a pretty good job of that yourself. 'least you're consistent.

She pulls free of him turns back to her friends. He smolders a moment, then --

RICHARD
Yeah, go on, bitch. Maybe I'll just get me some new pussy.

DEBORAH
(loud)
Nigga, if you had two more inches of dick, you'd find some new pussy right here.

Everyone's eyes widen in disbelief. Embarrassed, Richard storms off, leaving a satisfied Deborah behind. He bounds up the stairs with purpose. Comes to the top. Heads into his --

INT. OFFICE - SAME

-- where Prophet, Dirty Dick and Paul, all drunk, play dominoes.

PAUL
(to Richard)
My ace boon coon. You wanna get in a game before the ball drops?

DIRTY DICK
(re: game)
Goin' down to the boneyard, nigga.

Dick slaps down a tile. Richard ignores them, opens a drawer at his desk. Rifles through it. Takes out a GUN. Some bullets. Loads one in. They all jump up after him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

Richard comes down the stairs followed by his friends and FIRES A ROUND AT THE CEILING. Everyone stops, turns to him.

He levels the gun at Deborah. No one tries to stop him.

RICHARD

Say something now, bitch. Prove
you ain't got brains enough in your
head.

A bold, fed-up look befalls Deborah's face. Her friend tries
to hold her back, but Deborah pushes past, walks toward
Richard. She positions herself right in front of the gun.

DEBORAH

Go 'head. Put me out of my misery,
Richard, 'cause I can't take this
anymore. I'm sick of your paranoia
and your violence and your whores
and your militant macho bullshit.

Richard sweats, his gun hand shakes. He's off the deep end.

PAUL

Deborah. Don't.

DEBORAH

He won't do a goddamn thing, 'cause
it really is all bullshit, isn't
it, Richard? Way you jive all day
long about bein' too real for this,
too real for that. 'They buried my
show 'cause I'm too real for T.V.'
What, you think you cornered the
market on real? That you got a
copyright on the truth? Well, I'm
callin' you out 'cause I gotta
listen to that shit one more
minute, I'll put a bullet in my own
head. Is that real enough for you?

Richard starts to lower the gun. He's shattered.

RICHARD

Tha's enough, Deborah. You win.

She smiles. All eyes on her now. Looks to milk it, rub it in.

DEBORAH

Uh-uh, hold on. Is that it? Boy,
you really have got everyone
fooled. Like you'd actually do
something. When you and me, we
both know the real Richard Pryor
Show only happens when no one's
around.

(MORE)

DEBORAH (cont'd)

Yeah, we know all about that.
Cause what you really are is a
coward. And a failure. And a
country-ass crybaby wannabe pimp
who finally realized his reach
exceeds his grasp.

Jennifer watches from across the room, nervously.

DEBORAH

Well, here I am giving you a
chance, baby. Prove me wrong.
Show all these people what a crazy-
ass nigga you really are so they
can all go on believing in the
great Richard Pryor.

The silence and anticipation is so thick you could cut it
with a knife. Richard lowers the gun. Nods, defeated.
Deborah nods, triumphant. And suddenly --

RICHARD

Okay.

In one fluid motion, Richard cocks the gun, aims at her
forehead, and SQUEEZES THE TRIGGER.

Everyone gasps in unison --

-- CLICK -- an empty chamber. Deborah's mouth drops. Can't
believe he did it. Wide eyes all around. Nobody can.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

Deborah storms out with her two friends. Heads for her car.
Richard runs after her, followed by the rest of the crowd.

RICHARD

I knew it wasn't loaded. I just
wanted to scare you.

DEBORAH

There could've been one in the
chamber, you motherfucker! We're
finished, hear me?

She jumps into her car with her friends.

RICHARD

Whoa, whoa. Where you think you're
goin' in that? You leave here
tonight, you bitches leave on foot.

DEBORAH
This is my car, asshole.

RICHARD
Your car? I paid for the
motherfucker.

She ignores him, starts it up.

He jumps into another car. Starts it up. As Deborah starts moving forward, Richard RAMS HER WITH HIS CAR. Deborah and her friends scream. Richard jumps out.

DEBORAH
What're you doing?

Partygoers are crowding the driveway. Richard jumps in front of her car. Frantically loads his gun. She feints the car forward just a bit. He jumps back.

DEBORAH
Move, Richard.

He points the gun and SHOTS A TIRE FLAT.

DEBORAH
Fucking psycho!

RICHARD
Either you kill it or I will.

She tries to roll forward. Richard takes aim and BLASTS THE HOOD OVER AND OVER -- FIRING INTO THE ENGINE as the girls in the car scream, jump out.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

Richard is led in cuffs to the police car. He passes the shot up car. It's a mess. He looks at the screaming, hysterical Deborah, head up. Proud, coked out and defiant.

RICHARD
It's all yours now, bitch.

Turns and finds Jennifer among the crowd. They cast each other looks filled with desperation, regret... and longing.

INT. AIRPLANE - DAY

Jennifer stares out the window of the small prop plane at the glorious HAWAIIAN ISLANDS. The plane goes in for a landing on a small airstrip.

EXT. AIRSTRIP - SAME

A smiling, relaxed Richard waits with RASHON, late-20s, black and muscular, by his jeep as Jennifer is escorted down the steps of the plane. She runs to him. They kiss on the cheek.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Richard, Rashon and LISA, black, mid-20s sit in a quiet part of the room, eating and bullshitting. Jennifer is with them, but seems left out of the conversation. Every other word they say is "Nigga". She looks uncomfortable and unsure.

RASHON

I'm telling you, man, it's gonna be Dallas. Those niggas gonna take the ring this year.

RICHARD

Niggas wouldn't have a chance if it wasn't for Earl Campbell.

LISA

Now, that's a good-looking motherfucker. Only nigga I know in the NFL got a face like a movie star.

Jennifer can't take it anymore. Suddenly --

JENNIFER

Yeah, and the nigger's fast, too.

They all drop their forks, stare at her in disbelief. Look at one another. *Did she really say what I think she said?* She knows immediately she's done wrong.

JENNIFER

Oh God. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Richard gets up, holds out his hand. She hesitates, afraid. Looks up at him, pleading. He motions with his head, "C'mon." Takes her by the hand and leads her out of the restaurant.

EXT. RESTAURANT - SAME

She allows herself to be led silently down a path to the beach. Stops her on the sand. Points to the myriad stars.

RICHARD

See those stars?

(off her nod)

Which one's a nigger, Jennifer?

Can you tell?

She looks around the sky. All are as one. Bows her chin, ashamed. Shakes her head, no. He lifts her chin, gently.

RICHARD

Understand?

She nods and he embraces her, kindly, loving, forgiving. Here, they too are as one.

EXT. HANA, HI - DAY

VIGNETTES of Richard and Jennifer enjoying Hana, sometimes with Rashon and Lisa, sometimes alone. They FISH -- SWIM -- EAT -- SHOP -- STROLL THROUGH TOWN. Both relaxed and growing closer.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Richard and Jennifer drive past a lush landscape.

RICHARD

I got you something. At the bookstore in town.

He reaches into the backseat, pulls out a copy of THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X. Hands it to her.

RICHARD

Mean a lot to me if you read it.

She's touched. Knows he wants to let her into his world.

JENNIFER

I will.

He points out a field of grazing cattle. His eyes pop.

RICHARD

Moo cows. Let's go say hello.

He pulls over. Jennifer delights at his innocent enthusiasm.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Richard stands by a couple of cows. Holds out his hand at one of them like a mic, pretending to be a WHITE REPORTER as Jennifer looks on, amused.

RICHARD

So Mr. Cow, what's it like to have six stomachs?

(Black Cow Voice)

It's hard, man. Soon as I fill one up, 'nother one be growlin'. Makes me hungrier then a motherfucker.

(Reporter)

Any special lady cow in your life?

(Cow Voice)

Nah, I ain't wanna be with no heifer. Put up with the bitch mooing at me all damn day. 'Sides, I wanna get that nut, I can just reach down and milk my own self.

(Reporter)

Thank you, Mr. Cow, for that exclusive.

(off her laugh)

Deborah never woulda come out here. Bitch wouldn't take a chance she'd mess up her high heels.

JENNIFER

Guess that's the difference between me and Deborah. I'm willing to walk through cow shit with you.

RICHARD

You wanna know the difference? The real deal? I wanted to possess Deborah. But I wanna know you.

JENNIFER

Can't you do both?

Richard stares at her a bit. Smiles, then... starts doing a TRIBAL DANCE. Flailing and chanting nonsense as he dance circles around her to her amusement. Stops.

RICHARD

There. You belong to me now. You're mine and mine alone.

Jennifer takes this in...

JENNIFER

Well, shit, if it's that easy...

... suddenly breaks into the Tribal Dance around a delighted Richard. He joins in the revelry.

INT. JENNIFER'S ROOM - NIGHT

A hurricane thunders outside as Richard and Jennifer go at it in bed. Overzealous, he thrusts away at her mercilessly.

JENNIFER

Richard... Richard, wait.

He stops. Breathless.

RICHARD

What?

JENNIFER

Are you trying to catch a train?
Slow down. Please.

He laughs, looks down at her, lovingly. Strokes her.

RICHARD

My Jenny Lee.

Kisses her and continues. Gently now.

INT. JENNIFER'S ROOM - LATER

The hurricane has settled into heavy rains. Richard lays in bed and listens, visibly moved, as Jennifer sits on the balcony and plays a SONG OF LOVE & DESTINY on her guitar.

RICHARD

C'mere...

She sets down her guitar and crawls in bed, into his arms. Looks down at their skin -- the BLACK ON WHITE.

RICHARD

We're beautiful. First time in as long as I can remember, I feel peaceful.

JENNIFER

You deserve to feel peaceful.

He smiles at her. Warm. Genuine. Thank you.

JENNIFER

Can I ask you something? What's the revolution? You and your friends talk about the revolution a lot. I wanna understand it.

RICHARD

You read any Malcolm yet?

JENNIFER

A little.

RICHARD

Only get so much from a book anyway. White woman can't ever fully understand what it's like bein' black in America. White folks always been in charge, and niggas always fantasize about it bein' the other way around. The revolution is the struggle to turn that fantasy into reality.

JENNIFER

Is that what you want?

RICHARD

It was. But lately I been thinkin' what if in the end the real revolution turned out to be something nobody counted on.

JENNIFER

What's that?

RICHARD

People gettin' along.

Richard starts to go deep inside, loses himself in his own thoughts.

RICHARD

You think it's possible niggas and white folks could ever sit under one roof without a riot breakin' out?

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)

Laugh together, nod their heads together 'cause they recognize, even with all their differences -- whether it's skin color or the size 'a they dicks -- we all have anger, feel shame, wanna fuck and make it to the end of the journey with the least amount of pain.

JENNIFER

Why not? Look at us.

RICHARD

If I could do that? Unite motherfuckers in laughter and truth? Make their journeys a little less painful than mine was? That'd be something to see.

JENNIFER

I love you, Richard.

RICHARD

My Jenny Lee. I need you in my life.

JENNIFER

Just try and get rid of me now.

Suddenly, he takes her face in his hands, gently. Speaks with intensity.

RICHARD

Promise me something. Promise you won't ever hold back from me. That you'll say what's on your mind, no matter what I do or where I go in my head. I got so much runnin' through my mind all the time, shit gets jumbled up. I can't explain, it's like a -- a committee in my brain pullin' and pushin' me - that sometimes I just... forget myself.

JENNIFER

(a promise)

I'll remind you.

They kiss, tenderly. He lays on his side and she spoons him.

JENNIFER

Richard? I want to know you, too.

CLOSE ON RICHARD as he settles into her embrace. Comfortable and safe. Maybe for the first time. Behind his eyes, he considers her request. Breathes deeply. Okay. You will.

SFX OF AN AIRPLANE TAKES US TO --

EXT. PEORIA, ILLINOIS - DAY

To Establish. Dark pendulous clouds forecast an ominous day.

INT. CAR - SAME

Richard and Jennifer sit in the backseat, chauffeured through town. Richard, wearing a blank look, betrays nothing. Jennifer pats down her crisp ARMANI PANT SUIT.

JENNIFER

Do I look okay?

Jennifer shoots him an anticipatory glance. He answers back with an uneasy smile.

EXT. MAMA'S HOUSE - DUSK

A LARGE CROWD led by Aunt Dee and Uncle Dickie greets them as they head up the lawn from the car. Jennifer grabs on to Richard's hand, nervously. FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, COUSINS, spill out onto the porch, calling out greetings.

Aunt Dee eyes Jennifer, suspiciously, as all envelope Richard on his way into --

INT. MAMA'S HOUSE - PARLOR - SAME

Even more crowded in here. FRIENDS and FAMILY everywhere glad-hand Richard like the return of the conquering hero.

PEOPLE

Mr. Hollywood... you forget us poor folks?... You look good, baby...

He passes through, greeting as many as possible and pushing an overwhelmed Jennifer on them -- the lone white face in sea of black. People stare at her -- out of place in her Armani.

Aunt Dee whispers to Richard, points. He sees Mama across the room sitting upright in a chair like the expectant Queen.

Richard pulls Jennifer through the crowd to MAMA MARIE, who looks up at them with a haughty smile. He leans down, kisses her.

MAMA
My baby's come home.

RICHARD
Mama, this my girl, Jenny Lee.

JENNIFER
It's a pleasure to meet you, Mama Marie.

Jennifer shyly extends her hand. Mama shakes her head, cold.

MAMA
Can't shake your hand, Miss. Got salt in mine.

Jennifer looks at Richard, taken aback by being shut down. Finds no help. Turns back to Mama, grasping.

JENNIFER
Oh, uh... what's it for?

MAMA
Old remedy. Fix the pain right up.

Mama stands with difficulty. Richard helps her up.

MAMA
Gotta go mind the kitchen now. We been cookin' up some soul food jus' the way you like it, son.

UNCLE DICKIE
Whatchoo say we let the womens get on, pop us a bottle and git a game goin'?

RICHARD
Yeah. Sounds good, Unk.

Uncle Dickie starts leading Richard away. Jennifer follows, but Aunt Dee pulls her back.

AUNT DEE
Whyn't you help us with the food, baby? Learn jus' how he likes it.

Unsure at first, she watches Richard get swept away by Uncle Dickie and Friends. Finally relents... when in Rome. Allows herself to be pulled into the kitchen.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

It's cleared out a bit, but several neighbors and cousins still lounge around -- hanging out, drinking, getting high.

Richard sits at a table with Uncle Dickie, HAROLD, black, 50s, heavy-set -- JIMMY, black, 30s, a fast-talking hustler-type -- and SHOESHINE, black, 50s, shifty-eyed and dangerous -- all play poker while they drink, jive and reminisce.

SHOESHINE

I was at the Little Door when your daddy shot that nigga dead what was talkin' fresh to your Mama.

RICHARD

I saw the whole thing. Musta been ten or so.

UNCLE DICKIE

Tha's one thing about Buck. Your daddy didn't suffer no fools.

SHOESHINE

And you zippin' around like a junebug snatchin' up coins niggas'd drop from they drunk ass pockets.

UNCLE DICKIE

Packin' 'em away 'fore them cheap motherfuckers catch you, like a squirrel 'n his nuts.

Richard laughs heartily, enjoying the reminiscence.

SHOESHINE

Nigga was gettin' rich off us then, too.

RICHARD

Whatchoo mean 'then, too'?

HAROLD

He means, where you think you get all your material from, nigga?

Richard laughs uneasily. Doesn't like the implication.
Slams back a drink, refills his glass from the full bottle.
Glances toward the --

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Mama, Aunt Dee and several LADIES school Jennifer in cooking soul food. They fry, boil. Pull and push her this way and that. She glances toward the parlor. Aunt Dee pushes her face back toward the stove.

AUNT DEE

Boy's fine.

MAMA

'Course he fine. Now. He home.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PARLOR - LATER

Richard's bottle is now totally empty and all of them are three sheets to the wind, playing and jiving.

RICHARD

I ran all the way home, said,
'Father Davies kissed me on the
mouth', and you and daddy made me
call his ass up, talk all sexy --

UNCLE DICKIE

That sick motherfucker was beggin'
to have some game run on his ass.

JIMMY

Gotta watch that extortion, man.
Put my black ass in the joint.

RICHARD

-- Mama come in all mad, say,
'Whatcha all doin' to the boy --?'
Shut your asses down.

They all bust up at the imitation.

UNCLE DICKIE

We was only tryin' to show you how
to use every opportunity the good
Lord puts in front of ya.

HAROLD

Learned 'im good, too. Look atcha.
All prosperous and shit.

UNCLE DICKIE

That's family. Always lookin' out.
Don't you forget it.

Richard looks around the table at all of them feeling him out. Doesn't like where it's going.

RICHARD

Yeah. I'm'a go find Jenny.

He starts to get up, but is pushed back down by Shoeshine. Jimmy refills his glass.

SHOESHINE

You wanna go in there while they fryin' up? You know how Mama get when she's cookin', boy. Give 'em a chance to get to know the girl. Go 'head, put this back.

Pushes the drink at him. He drinks up, looks to the kitchen. All but Richard look to Uncle Dickie.

UNCLE DICKIE

Good a time as any, I guess. Wanted to talk to you about somethin', son. Jimmy, you wanna... ?

JIMMY

Some business opportunities been poppin' up in the community, Rich.

HAROLD

Way to give somethin' back.

RICHARD

Izzat right?

SHOESHINE

Think about somethin', boy. Think about where you'd be you didn't have us to talk about. This place. These people. Your people.

UNCLE DICKIE

Tha's right. Always remember who made ya.

Richard grows darker and darker as they bombard him. His head begins to spin.

EVERYBODY

'Member where you come from...
gave you all your material... loves
you... man's got obligations...

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Jennifer sweats over the stove as Mama and Aunt Dee watch her struggle with amusement. Suddenly, a loud COMMOTION from the other room. They all rush into the --

INT. PARLOR - SAME

-- where Richard THROWS ANOTHER LIQUOR BOTTLE AGAINST THE WALL, smashing it. He alternates between crying and screaming in a drunken rage.

RICHARD

Go on. Say somethin' else!

All the neighbors and friends in the living room are stunned.

MAMA

Whatchoo all do to him?

UNCLE DICKIE

We didn't do nothin'. We just
jivin' and the nigga go crazy.

RICHARD

Yeah, you jivin', all right.
"Don't forget where you came from,
boy. Who made ya. Who you are."
Who I am or who you want me to be?

Jennifer watches, frozen in place. Knows it's not her place.

MAMA

Now son, just calm down.

AUNT DEE

Baby, we love you.

RICHARD

YOU NEVER LOVED ME!

They are all stunned by the remark.

RICHARD

Ever since I was a little boy you wanted me to do everything your way. You wanted me to be a pimp. But I couldn't do it.

He's crying now. Trying to catch his breath between sobs. Whirls on Dickie and the others from the table.

RICHARD

Why won't you let me be who I am? You want me to be like all of you, stuck here in Peoria doing nothing with your lives.

UNCLE DICKIE

Easy, boy. That ain't right.

RICHARD

My father woulda never taken money from me the way Uncle Dickie does. What do you think he'd think of that, Mama? What do you think your son Buck would think?

Uncle Dickie shrinks at the accusation. Richard whirls on Mama. Points, fiercely.

RICHARD

And you! You took me away from my mother. I loved her. Didn't you know that, Mama?

Richard bolts out the door into the yard, crying. Jennifer looks around at the stunned family. Exits after him.

INT. FRONT YARD - SAME

Jennifer reaches out to the sobbing Richard, but he recoils.

JENNIFER

Richard... ?

Uncle Dickie and Aunt Dee pass her.

AUNT DEE

This a family thing. Ain't nothin' you can do. Go back inside now.

They flank him on both sides, neither letting him pull away. Mama watches from the doorway as Shoeshine walks out, takes Jennifer by the arm, leads her reluctantly back to the house.

SHOESHINE

Boy was sayin' you play the guitar.
I play some myself...

INT. PARLOR - SAME

Shoeshine walks Jennifer through the parlor where all the shocked family and friends are talking. Their eyes follow her through the room and towards the stairs.

Mama glares at her. Gestures for Jimmy to come over. Whispers something to him. He nods. She watches Shoeshine take Jennifer up the stairs. Aunt Dee comes back in as Jimmy rushes off on a task.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Mama, Aunt Dee and Uncle Dickie sit around the table picking at soul food. All look thoroughly exhausted.

AUNT DEE

I'll fix him a plate later on, if
he's hungry.

Jennifer walks in.

UNCLE DICKIE

You want some of this?

JENNIFER

No, thank you. Where's Richard?

MAMA

Resting.

JENNIFER

Where?

MAMA

Upstairs. And he don' wanna be
disturbed, neither.

JENNIFER

I don't understand --

MAMA

He got company. Plain enough? You
leave 'im alone now.

Jennifer stares at them in disbelief. She and Mama lock eyes. Hard. Jennifer understands now.

In this moment, in Mama's look, and in the family's defiant solidarity -- IT'S GOING TO BE A BATTLE FOR CONTROL. Of Richard's soul.

Jennifer turns and exits.

MAMA

I don't know wha's goin' on out there in Hollywood, but my boy never cussed out his family 'fore this white honky bitch came along.

AUNT DEE

What we a'posed to do 'bout it?

By the look in her eye, Mama's got some ideas.

INT. HOUSE - TOP OF STAIRS - SAME

Jennifer comes to the top of the landing. Passes several closed doors. Pauses at one of them a moment. Wondering... *should she?*

After a long deliberation, she moves past it, goes into the --

INT. GUEST ROOM - SAME

-- curls up in bed. Pulls her well read, dog-eared copy of MALCOLM X off the night stand and reads.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GUEST ROOM - LATER

Jennifer lies asleep on top of the covers, her book by her side. Richard walks in, stands over her for a bit. Love and regret in his eyes.

He crawls in bed next to her. Stares up at the ceiling. Puts his hand on her body and drifts off.

FADE OUT.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - 2005 - DAY

Clean, comfortable office. Jennifer sits in a chair across from DR. GOLDSTEIN, female, 50s -- a quiet calming presence. Jennifer rubs her head.

DR. GOLDSTEIN
Headache?

JENNIFER
Migraines.

DR. GOLDSTEIN
Stress. Lot on your plate.

JENNIFER
Yeah. That and a lot of scar
tissue around my brain from...
(uncomfortable laugh)
... back in the day shit.

DR. GOLDSTEIN
Mmm-hmm.
(beat; considers)
Let me ask you a difficult
question, Jen. With the MS
advanced as it is, Richard to some
degree incapacitated... do you ever
have any thoughts about getting
back at him... y'know, for...
"back in the day shit"?

Deafening silence. Jennifer appears taken aback by the
question. Unsure how to answer. Considers it carefully.
Suddenly, reaches for her purse. Digs through.

JENNIFER
Can I... I need to take something.
I'm having... shooting pains...

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - LATER

Carmen and the other Nurse clean and straighten the room, and
prepare for the FEEDING PROCEDURE.

JENNIFER (V.O.)
It's funny, 'cause for years people
have been trying to pin me with the
whole revenge motive.

Visible out the window on the PATIO, Jennifer gently pushes
Richard around the POOL.

EXT. PATIO - SAME

QUICK CUTS of Jennifer and Richard spending time together. Wheeling a sleeping Richard around the pool, frequently catching their reflection in the water --

JENNIFER (V.O.)

Maybe 'cause that's what they were looking for. Richard left a lot of destruction in his wake. But me? My need to love and protect him has always been greater than any anger I ever had... however justified. And most of that anger had more to do with how badly he abused himself.

-- sitting with him on the patio, adjusting his body for comfort -- regaling him with memories and enjoying his subtle but noticeable reactions -- watching the sun set.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - 2005 - SAME

She's deep within herself now. Her face is a mix of emotions, but the love and sincerity come through.

JENNIFER

Truth is I'm grateful. After all the shit, I'm grateful we've had this time together. Away from the drugs and the guns and the women and the parties. To heal.

(absurd laugh)

'Cause, goddamn, did we have to heal.

EXT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - DRIVEWAY - 1978 - DAY

The gate opens slowly, allowing cars to enter.

Richard watches through a window as several cars head up the driveway. His eyes pop in anticipation.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Chicken is frying in a pan, as Mama and Aunt Dee, Mercy and another cook, BARBARA, 30s, cook up soul food in every available space. They all follow Mama's orders.

Richard walks in, dips his hand in some sauce and licks his fingers. Mama smacks him hard in the head several times.

MAMA

Where your manners at?

RICHARD

Ow. Goddamn, Mama, that's my ear.

MAMA

Well, you ain't never listen so
whatchoo need it for?

(back to work)

Mercy, you throw this here in the
pot. Barbara, set some plates on
the table outside 'fore they come.

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - SAME

Jennifer walks in and out of the closet, trying on clothes as
Richard enters in a newly pensive mood.

RICHARD

They're here. You comin' down?

JENNIFER (O.S.)

How much longer will Mama Marie be
staying?

RICHARD

What kinda question is that?

Jennifer comes out, wraps a skirt around her.

JENNIFER

She's been here, what, a month now?
She's hiring her own people.
Making everyone jump through hoops.
They whisper behind my back, did
you know that? Mama, Aunt Dee,
Mercy, Barbara. They shoot me
looks. Make me feel like the
enemy. How much longer am I gonna
have to put with it?

RICHARD

She's my Mama, Jenny. Whatchoo
expect me to do?

JENNIFER

I expect you to show her and everyone else around here that I'm yours. Not to be treated like one of her Washington Avenue whores looking to short-change the house.

They stare each other down. He burns inside. She exits. He lingers behind a moment, still smoldering.

EXT. ESTATE - DAY

Vignettes of Sunday fun. Richard, Jennifer and FRIENDS including MARVIN GAYE, 30s, his wife JAN and her two GIRLFRIENDS, Rashon, Paul, Prophet his GIRLFRIEND and Uncle Dickie engage in various activities --

SWIMMING IN THE POOL -- TENNIS -- CONVERSATION. Richard frequently glances over at Jennifer without her knowledge -- anger burning beneath a sly smile.

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME

Richard sits at the head of a long table holding court with everyone, eating and drinking.

Jennifer sits a few seats away from Richard. A silver tray with lines of coke is passed from person to person.

RICHARD

Now, my woman? She does not back down when she believes in something or thinks she's right. Do you, Jenny?

JENNIFER

I made a promise.

RICHARD

I love it 'cause she makes me take a look at myself, see what's really goin' on inside, and that makes me grow.

MARVIN

Everybody gotta know there's a limit, though. Man's a man.

RICHARD

Naw, Marvin man, my lady tells it like it is no matter what.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
Got impeccable instincts for the
truth, jus' like my Mama. 'Cause
what's Mama always say, Unk?

UNCLE DICKIE
Gotta be able to spot whether not
you can turn a bitch out.

RICHARD
(quietly; eyes on Jenny)
Tha's right.

Paul and Prophet look at each other, uncomfortably. They
know their friend. Something's coming.

RICHARD
Watch, you'll see what I'm talkin'
'bout. Jenny?

JENNIFER
Hmm?

RICHARD
Who among the women at this
table... would you say is a whore?

JENNIFER
Richard...

RICHARD
It's okay. Tell us. Make me proud.

Jennifer looks around the table. Gets no help from anyone.
Most look away in fear. She looks at Marvin who shakes his
head in warning. But Jennifer points -- to Marvin's wife's
two friends.

JENNIFER
I think... she is and... her.

Gasps, no one can believe she actually did it.

RICHARD
That's fucked up. Now apologize to
each of the women you offended.

JENNIFER
You asked my opinion.

RICHARD
Yes, but I didn't think you'd be
fool enough to give it.

Mama walks out with food, sets it down.

RICHARD

Mama, Jennifer thinks these women
are whores. You're the expert.
What do you think?

Mama looks at Jennifer with contempt. Back to Richard.

MAMA

I think you're a damn fool.

Mama heads off. Richard grows darker.

RICHARD

Bitch, you better apologize and
fast.

JENNIFER

No. And don't talk to me like
that. You asked my opinion and I
gave --

Richard picks up a champagne bottle and hurls it across the
table where it catches Jennifer in the head with a THUNK.

The people at the table gasp, but say nothing. Richard is
king here. Jennifer holds her head, a look of hurt and
confusion on her face.

JENNIFER

Why did you do that?

RICHARD

'Cause I can. I'm showin' you and
everyone else here that you're
mine, and I can talk to you any
goddamn way I want.

Jennifer knows her demand has been thrown back in her face.
Crestfallen, she shoots up and heads toward the house.

RICHARD

See? I told you she was
hardheaded.

The table breaks up in laughter. Hail to the king.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Jennifer walks into the busy kitchen.

JENNIFER

Barbara, I need an ice pack.

Barbara looks to Mama then turns back to her work.

BARBARA

There's ice in the freezer. You
can make one.

JENNIFER

What did you say?

BARBARA

(softly)

I work for Mr. Pryor.

JENNIFER

I hired you.

BARBARA

Mr. Pryor pays me.

Jennifer notices a smile at the edges of Mama's mouth.

JENNIFER

Not anymore. You're fired.

MAMA

Ain't nobody fired. I need her.

JENNIFER

You can find somebody else, 'cause
this bitch is fired.

In a fury of disbelief, Jennifer reaches into the freezer,
pulls out an icepack and starts to exit. Turns to Barbara.

JENNIFER

You better be gone by tomorrow,
understand me? I don't want to see
your ugly face again. Everybody's
replaceable, remember that.

She storms off.

MAMA

(under her breath)

You remember that.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Jennifer looks down at the --

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

-- where Richard says goodbye to everybody, as they get in their cars and drive off. He glances up at her in the window.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Richard enters to Jennifer, playing guitar by herself. He comes up behind her, gently strokes her hair. She stops.

JENNIFER

Don't touch me.

RICHARD

Let me make it up to you.

She stands, turns to him. Waiting. How?

RICHARD

What would you do if I asked you to let me suck your pussy?

JENNIFER

I'd say you're crude and tell you to get out.

RICHARD

C'mon, Jenny Lee, I want to make you feel good. Let me suck your pussy.

JENNIFER

If you say that to me one more time... I'll punch you in the nose.

Richard smiles. Loves the confrontation. Leans into her.

RICHARD

I want... to suck... your... pussy.

No hesitation -- CRACK! -- She PUNCHES HIM SQUARE IN THE NOSE. Runs out of the room immediately.

He's stunned a moment as blood gushes from his nostrils. But quickly gives in to rage and bolts from the room, furious.

INT. LIVING' ROOM - SAME

A crazed and bloody Richard runs in to find Uncle Dickie lounging around watching T.V.

RICHARD

Where is she? Bitch hit me in the nose, Unk. I'm gonna kill her.

UNCLE DICKIE

She ran past. Didn't see where.
Word of advice, boy, you be careful
with that one. My daddy always
said, 'The Irish is niggas turned
inside out.'

EXT. BACKYARD - SAME

Richard runs out, searches the orange groves on a mission to kill. Screams in frustration.

RICHARD

JENNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN!!!

His scream echoes throughout the bushes where Jennifer hides. She breathes heavily, eyes wide in fear. Stays put.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Richard digs through a desk drawer, finds some PERCODAN. Downes a few with a bottle of COGNAC and continues to fume.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard lays on his side, in a doped up half-sleep. Jennifer enters cautiously. Notices the percodan and cognac.

She slips into bed. Wraps around him. They settle into one another as if all is forgiven --

RICHARD

... my tough Irish bitch...

-- and drift off.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

The sunlight streaks through the window bathing the room in a peaceful gauze. Jennifer and Richard lay in bed asleep. Suddenly the INTERCOM BUZZES. Jennifer stirs, picks it up.

JENNIFER

Hello... ? Hold on... Richard...

Richard turns over, opens his eyes with difficulty.

JENNIFER

It's Mama.

He takes the Intercom Phone.

RICHARD

Wassa matter, Mama? No. Jenny don't wanna see her, I don't wanna see her. It's too early for this. Just give her an extra week's and get rid of her... I don't care. You can hire someone else.

He reaches over Jennifer, hangs it up. They settle back in to sleep. Several moments go by, then the INTERCOM BUZZES again, shattering the calm. Annoyed, Jennifer picks it up.

JENNIFER

Yes, Mama? Hold on.

She holds the Intercom out to Richard.

JENNIFER

There's a man outside with a stick?
I dunno what she's talking about.

He takes it.

RICHARD

Hello? What are you talking about,
Mama? What man with a stick?

Suddenly, the bedroom door bursts open. BARBARA runs in carrying a huge TWO-BY-FOUR BOARD, hate in her eyes.

She raises it above her head, swings it down on Jennifer's legs with all her might. Jennifer screams and Richard jumps out of bed in terror and confusion.

It all happens too fast. Richard watches stunned as Barbara jumps on top of Jennifer, huge thighs pinning down Jennifer's legs, and starts CHOKING HER in a fury.

Jennifer's eyes flash to Richard in a panic, but Richard just stands there. Is that a smile?

JENNIFER

Richard -- please --

Suddenly, Richard grabs Barbara, pulls her off the gasping Jennifer. The scene is surreal.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Jennifer and Mama scream at each other with Richard in the middle.

MAMA

I don't know what you talkin'
'bout. Oughta be ashamed,
hollerin' at an old lady.

JENNIFER

What's it, whorehouse punishment?
Some kind of sick bordello justice
for taking your son away?

MAMA

You ain't takin' nothin'.
(to Richard)
And you, lettin' her play that
hillbilly lynchin' music all day
long. Whatsa matter with you?

JENNIFER

You're what's the matter. You make
him crazy. Manipulating cunt.

RICHARD

Jenny, don't you talk to her like
that. She's still my Mama.

JENNIFER

You see what she did to me? What
she's doing to you? Say something,
you weak sonofabitch.

She slaps him. Hard. Grazes his already injured nose. His eyes glaze over. She knows that look. Runs.

Richard catches her. Slaps her to the ground. Starts punching her square in the face.

RICHARD
White... honky... bitch...

Crack. Over and over. It's the beating of a lifetime.

INT. CAR - DAY

Rashon drives Jennifer, who lays in the backseat, beaten to a pulp, crying and sobbing. She notices him stealing glances at her in the rearview with a blank expression on his face.

JENNIFER
(between sobs)
... Rashon... ?

He looks ahead, stone-faced and silent.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

A DOCTOR, 40s, stitches Jennifer up carefully.

DOCTOR
He shouldn't have done this to you.
You know that, don't you Jennifer?

She blinks. Mute. Does she?

INT. ER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jennifer looks at herself in the mirror, the artificial sodium light amplifies the grotesqueness of her facial wounds. She paws her face. Unrecognizable. Sobs.

JENNIFER
... he... needs me...

INT. RICHARD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Richard sits at his desk, drowning himself in a bottle. Jennifer walks in, says nothing. Richard can't look at her. She walks right up to him.

JENNIFER
Look at me, Richard.

He looks up at her, what he's done to her. Starts bawling.

RICHARD

Wha've I done to you? Why'd you
come back?

He puts his head against her stomach, and she cradles it
there. She holds his head up so he can see her face.

JENNIFER

She's brought the whorehouse here.
Everything you spent your life
trying to escape.

(stoic)

I can wear the scars and share your
shame, 'cause, God help me, I love
you no matter how hard you make it
or how brutally you push me away.
But I can't fight them for you.
They know you too well. You're the
only one who can silence those
voices that push you and pull you.

(beat)

You have to ask yourself, where am
I when I'm most at peace? When I'm
not a pimp or a player or the
family purse. Where am I... when
I'm just Richard?

They stay there, sobbing together. He stands. Takes her by
the hand and starts leading her out of the room. She recoils.

JENNIFER

Where are we going?

RICHARD

Last place I was just Richard.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Richard and Jennifer speed through streets in silence.

EXT. COMEDY STORE - NIGHT

Richard pulls to the curb outside the club. Kills the car.

RICHARD

So much I wanna say that I can
never say to Mama. To any of 'em.
But once I get up there, I know the
words'll come.

INT. COMEDY STORE - SAME

Richard walks into the darkened room with Jennifer as a COMIC does his act for a small audience. Several in the audience turn around, notice him. Start whispering.

AUDIENCE

... Richard Pryor... look, honey...
is that him?... it is, it's him...

The Comic on stage notices the audience distracted, looks to the back and sees Richard. His mouth drops.

MITZI SHORE, late-30s, the owner, comes over to Richard who, much to his shy chagrin, has become the center of attention. She kisses him on the cheek.

MITZI

Don't ever stay away from my place
so long again. You hear me?

COMIC

Ladies and gentlemen, seems like
the comedy gods have smiled on us
tonight. Mr. Pryor, would you?

The audience applauds. Richard heads slowly for the stage. Takes the mic from the respectful comic.

In the darkness of the back, Mitzi smiles at Jennifer, notices her face and turns back to the stage. Jennifer shrinks back into the darkness of the bar, embarrassed.

On stage, Richard starts softly, unsure of what to say.

RICHARD

Didn't prepare nothin', but, tell
you the truth it feels good to be
up here. So what're you gonna talk
about, Rich?

He looks into the expectant audience. He and Jennifer lock eyes in the back, and suddenly he knows --

RICHARD

My grandmother... Lord God, my
grandmother -- yeah, I wanna -- I
wanna talk about my grandmother.
My grandmother's the one who always
used to discipline me. Discipline.
That's a kind word. Beat my ass.
(off their laugh)
(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
Anyone here remember them switches,
used to have to get off the tree?

Audience murmurs their remembrance.

RICHARD
You'd have to get 'em off the tree
yourself, pick the leaves off and
shit? I see one of those trees
today got them switches on 'em, I
will kill one of them
motherfuckers. I will stop the
car, get out...

Jennifer watches in awe as he mimes destroying a tree. Back
in his element. Not the Richard she's used to lately. She
grabs a napkin off the bar. Flags down the BARTENDER.

JENNIFER
Can I borrow a pen?

The BARTENDER hands her one, and Jennifer starts writing --
"MAMA MARIE/ TREES/ SWITCHES."

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Richard escorts Mama, Aunt Dee and Uncle Dickie through the
terminal as Jennifer follows at a safe distance.

They stop at a gate. Richard kisses them all goodbye. Mama
shoots Jennifer a nasty look. You've won this round.

Jennifer flashes a triumphant smile.

INT. CAR - DAY

Richard listens intently as Jennifer goes over her notes.

JENNIFER
... you might wanna wait a while
before you go into the next part...

INT. COMEDY STORE - NIGHT

Richard plays to a packed house.

RICHARD
... but I'd much rather have my
grandmother discipline me than my
father. My father was scary.
(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
I'd do somethin', he'd call me, I'd
just piss on myself. "RICHARD!"
"Huh?"

Makes a pissing noise and looks down at his pants. Audience goes wild. Jennifer sits in the back, cracking up and taking notes. Her face seems to be healing before our eyes.

INT. RICHARD'S LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Jennifer and Richard have NOTE SESSION over eggs and coffee. The room crackles with love and energy.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jennifer buttons up Richard's dress shirt. He slips on his jacket. Checks himself in the mirror. Sharp.

RICHARD
The lady has taste.

JENNIFER
You look sharp. Wait.

Jennifer pops up, runs out of the room, comes back in with a GARDENIA. Tucks it into his lapel. Perfect.

INT. COMEDY STORE - NIGHT

Richard woodsheds to a packed house. He's vibrant -- a new man. David Franklin sits with Jennifer, laughing.

RICHARD
I just found out that women,
sometimes they don't get orgasm,
right? My bitch wouldn't get a
orgasm right away. Fucked me up,
'cause I thought I was doin' some
serious fuckin'. I'm talkin' 'bout
when you get the hump in your back.
Face get all ugly.

Richard mimes this.

RICHARD
Say, "Hey, baby, how was it?" She
go --

Richard does a So-So motion with his hand. Audience dies. Jennifer watches -- an IDEA FORMING IN HER HEAD.

INT. COMEDY STORE - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard and Jennifer talk argue with David.

DAVID FRANKLIN

New act's outta sight, Rich, but I gotta say, a stand-up film? Losing proposition. You tour, whoever wants to see you can see you live. Yell back. Get that crowd interaction. People can't do that in a movie theater.

JENNIFER

David, movies reach a wider audience. This is Richard being Richard. No script. No story. No network standards. His words on screen. Totally raw.

DAVID FRANKLIN

Jennifer, no disrespect but maybe you should stick to --

RICHARD

(warning)

David... book a theater, get some cameras. Make it happen.

INT. COMEDY STORE - MAIN ROOM - SAME

Richard walks out with Jennifer and David, who talk as Richard is accosted by fans. He signs autographs, shakes hands.

Rashon walks into the club looking grave. He waves Jennifer over. Richard looks up from signing something, notices Rashon and Jennifer talking. Something's off.

They both look to him. Whatever it is, it's bad.

INT. PEORIA HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY

Richard and Jennifer rush down the hall. The WHOLE FAMILY waits in a cluster near a door. Waiting for him.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Richard and Jennifer stand by Mama's bed. She's unwell, close to death. Looks away from Jennifer.

RICHARD

Mama, say hello to Jennifer.

Mama cocks her head reluctantly toward Jennifer. Nods. Turns back to Richard. Reaches with difficulty for his coat-sleeve.

MAMA

(with difficulty)

Is this warm?

Jennifer notices tears streaming down his face. He nods for her to go. She heads for the door.

RICHARD

Jenny.

She stops, turns back. Richard looks from Mama back to Jennifer. Proving something.

RICHARD

I love you.

Jennifer and Mama lock eyes a split second. Mama wears a stoic expression. No acknowledgment of the way things are now. And Jennifer knows there never will be. She exits.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - SAME

Jennifer comes out, looks at the family gathered outside. They look away from her. She crosses to the other side of the corridor. Miles of distance between them.

Richard steps out and is swallowed by family. He allows himself to be swept into their circle of love and grief, but takes frequent looks at Jennifer standing patiently to the side. Understanding.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Richard crouches in the snow. He cries and cries as Jennifer holds him close.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAR - DAY

Richard drives Jennifer through Los Angeles. Smiles at her.

JENNIFER

Gonna tell me where we're going?

RICHARD

I don't wanna ruin the surprise.

INT. EDITING SUITE - DAY

The EDITOR shows Richard and Jennifer the OPENING CREDITS in which Richard is filmed getting out of the limousine with Jennifer, holding her hand and walking backstage at the LONG BEACH ARENA. Jennifer watches, stunned.

JENNIFER

What is this?

RICHARD

Opening credits. It's my gift to you. For helping me through this. Bringing me back to myself. I want the whole world to see... I'm with you.

She squeezes his hand, overwhelmed. David Franklin stands behind them, looking over their shoulders. Jennifer turns, smiles up at him. He returns the smile, but the second she pulls away it falls off his face. Hard.

CLOSE on the MOVIEOLA as the film plays on without sound.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

RICHARD PRYOR: LIVE IN CONCERT rolls on the screen for a PACKED AUDIENCE.

David Franklin, Jennifer and Paul sneak into the back of the house. The audience roars at every word as Richard talks about the various topics of his life over the past year --

-- THE CAR SHOOTING -- MAMA -- COPS -- JENNIFER HERSELF.

The audience yells back at the screen. Participates as if there's nothing between them and Richard.

DAVID FRANKLIN
They're yelling back at the screen.
like he's right in front of them.
I've never seen anything like it.

By the look on Paul and Jennifer's faces, neither have they.

INT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - SAME

Richard swigs from a bottle of vodka. Snorts cocaine. Pours through pictures of he and Mama.

He wanders through the big, lonely house. Looking around. Drunkenly contemplating.

Smashes windows, rages at walls, falls to the floor crying.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

Rashon holds the car door open for Richard who climbs inside.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - SAME

Jennifer, David and Paul scan the demonstrative audience.

DAVID
This is gonna open huge.

PAUL
'Course it is. Look around. More than half these people are white.

They all scan the audience. Amazing. Black and white, laughing together in one room. Slapping each other five.

JENNIFER
I wish Richard could see this.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Richard has rough sex with TWO PROSTITUTES. Dumps some money on the night table. Exits.

INT. CAR - SAME

Rashon peaks at Richard drinking in the backseat.

RASHON

Where to, man?

Richard stares out the window. *Where to, indeed?*

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jennifer wakes up. Turns over. No Richard.

INT. OFFICE - SAME

She walks in. Goes behind his desk. Looks down at a fresh copy of DAILY VARIETY on top of the new mail. The headline reads PRYOR FILM NO JOKE -- FUNNY MAKES MONEY.

She takes the paper, reads as she walks over to the window.

Looks down at the driveway, where RICHARD lies asleep in his clothes, shards of a broken liquor bottle all around him.

She glances at Variety -- the height success. Then back to Richard in the driveway -- the depths of personal failure. The glaring contrast is reflected in her eyes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A frenzy of activity as CREW MEMBERS lay down wire, rig cable, lights and cameras. Something big happening here. Jennifer directs them all, answers questions, etc.

Richard walks in, looks unsteady. Surveils the scene. Notices Jennifer across the room talking animatedly with a GAFFER. She touches his arm, his back. Laughing and chatting. Richard's eyes burn red.

David Franklin walks up to him.

DAVID

She's coming up the driveway now.
Wanna greet her?

Richard looks at him, glazed. David motions for a P.A.

DAVID

Do me a favor, get Mr. Pryor some
black coffee?

The P.A runs off. Richard's eyes follow Jennifer as David leads him off. To him it's unmistakable. She's flirting with members of the crew.

DAVID

I told the producers you're clean and sober, so keep that in mind. I'm not saying don't be real, it's just this kind of crossover success... I don't have to tell you how rare it is, especially for an Afro-American artist, so we wanna do everything we can to maintain it. Right?

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER

DIRECTOR, CREW, Jennifer and David surrounding them, BARBARA WALTERS, late 40s, interviews a charming and amiable Richard on his couch.

BARBARA

So... Richard.

RICHARD

Barbara.

BARBARA

Are you totally off drugs?

RICHARD

(matter-of-factly)

No. I love drugs. I really do.

Glances over at David who puts his head in his hands.

RICHARD

Um, but I can't do 'em a lot because it messes my life up. Every time I get in trouble it's 'cause I end up drinking too much or snortin' too much, smokin' too much... but I like drugs.

(off David's disapproving look)

And I don't wanna say it, like, to make other people wanna do it.

(beat; sighs)

But I like some cocaine now and then, sit around with my friends and get high.

Jennifer and the crew watch, mouths agape, at his candor.

BARBARA

When you're on stage, you talk about -- it's hard for me to say, but -- you use the word nigger a lot. See, I can't say it.

RICHARD

You just did. Said it pretty good, too. That's not the first time you said it either.

Crew laughs. Barbara blushes, embarrassed.

BARBARA

Yes it is. But I want to talk about why you do.

RICHARD

I don't know, I grew up hearing certain things, so I rebelled by doing it myself, and I guess... it takes the sting out of it a little bit. I guess if I do it, ain't nobody else can hurt me with it.

BARBARA

Has Jennifer made a difference in your life?

RICHARD

Yes. She came to me when I was in need, and she stood by me through a lot of pain that most people walked away from. And we got to love each other for real, not just the word part. We went through a lot of stuff together, racism, lotta stuff... to find out that we really have souls and we were just people.

Jennifer casts Richard a heartfelt, loving look.

RICHARD

You talk about racism so much that I have to ask... do you see everything as black and white?

He glances over at Jennifer for a split second, then back to Barbara. Thinks long and hard about this. Exhales, then --

RICHARD

I see everything as the nucleus of a great idea that hasn't come to be yet.

INT. ESTATE - LATER

QUICK CUTS of MADNESS as Richard chases Jennifer through the house. Drags her, screaming, across the floor by her hair. They both smash windows. A knock-down, drag out fight.

RICHARD

... you tellin' me you didn't suck their cocks in the backyard...?

JENNIFER

... you paranoid fuck... why... why are you doing this... ?

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Jennifer tries to comfort Richard, while copious tears roll down both their bloody faces. They both snort cocaine in between the bouts of crying and apologies.

INT. DR. CANNON'S OFFICE - DAY

Richard sits across from DR. CANNON, black, 50s, a psychiatrist. Richard grips a strange looking DOLL.

RICHARD

She buys me silly things to cheer me up. Everyday, something new. She's sweet.

DR. CANNON

You think you need cheering up?

Richard shrugs. Dr. Cannon looks at him, thinking.

DR. CANNON

What about cocaine do you like?

RICHARD

It fucks me up. I like that ping it puts in my head.

DR. CANNON

Do you see how it removes you from reality? Mentally and physically?

RICHARD

I don't need to be in reality 'cause I've seen how ugly the world is.

Dr. Cannon seems to be mulling something over in his mind.

DR. CANNON

Let me ask you something, Richard, would you say your voice, your particular kind of observational comedy is Afro-centric.

RICHARD

If that means what I think it means then yeah.

DR. CANNON

Have you ever actually been to Africa?

RICHARD

No.

DR. CANNON

Well then, how can you make such extreme statements about the ugliness of the world when you've never been to the origin of the world's beauty?

Dr. Cannon pulls a book from his desk, hands it to Richard. Richard looks down at it. It's call *Origins*.

EXT. NAIROBI, KENYA - DAY

Super: Nairobi, Kenya

Richard and Jennifer take in the sights of the city. Bask in the radically different culture. The BAZAARS, MUSEUMS, RESTAURANTS. Richard looks around in wonder -- NOTHING BUT BLACK FACES EVERYWHERE -- all calmly going about their day.

RICHARD

There are no niggers here, Jenny Lee. Ain't no black people, neither. S'just... people.

INT. JEEP - DAY

Richard drives through the bush while Jennifer looks at a map in the passenger seat.

JENNIFER

We're already on the Maasai reserve
so the lodge shouldn't be far.

Richard takes in his surroundings. Animals roam free in and out of the bush as far as the eye can see. Jennifer points to a lion chasing a gazelle. The lion attacks. Begins to eat it, digging in with gusto.

RICHARD

Nigga eats like my daddy used to.

Richard mimes what he means. They drive on. Up ahead, a HALF DOZEN LIONS lounge lazily just off the road.

He stops the jeep. Rolls down the window, starts shooting pictures of the majestic creatures.

JENNIFER

They're beautiful.

RICHARD

You know what they call a bunch of
lions together like that?

JENNIFER

A pride.

RICHARD

Pride, tha's right. You think that
shit's a coincidence?

Richard stops shooting pictures. He starts to open the car door. Jennifer grabs his shirt, terrified.

JENNIFER

What're you doing?

RICHARD

Shhh. You'll disturb them.

JENNIFER

You're the one who's disturbed.
Richard, please don't do this.

He smiles. Pulls free of her and gets out of the car. One of the lion's heads pops up, looks to Richard standing by the car, then goes back to resting.

Richard begins to creep forward slowly, bravely and/or stupidly, until he's five feet from the slumbering beasts.

Jenny watches from the car as Richard begins to snap pictures. One of the lions stretches out its paw.

Richard continues to shoot. Suddenly, A LION POPS UP in one fluent movement challenging Richard.

Richard stares him down, fearless.

The lion roars in warning -- You're too close, motherfucker. Richard continues to stare him down. Pride. Defiance.

The reflection of the lion can be seen in Richard's eyes and vice versa. Two warriors -- no back off.

Suddenly, the lion takes a step towards him, roars loudly. Richard nods and high-tails it back to the car.

INT. JEEP - MOMENTS LATER

Richard drives, pounds on the roof of the jeep, exuberant. Jennifer chastises him.

RICHARD

I AM A PROUD AFRICAN MAN!

JENNIFER

You were almost a dead African man.
What were you thinking, Richard?
You scared me half to death.

RICHARD

My eyes are open, Jenny Lee. For the first time in my life, my mind is clear. And I know.

JENNIFER

What? What do you know?

RICHARD

I know I've been wrong. I know what's right. And I know exactly what I have to do about it.

EXT. COMEDY STORE - NIGHT

A long line snakes down the block.

INT. COMEDY STORE - SAME

Richard, a new light in his eyes, speaks purposefully to the audience.

RICHARD

I took a trip. Went home to the motherland. Everybody should go to Africa. Especially black people.

Scattered applause and shouts of approval.

RICHARD

There is so much to see there for the eye and the heart. But one thing I got out of it, I'd like to share with you, 'cause it was magical. I was runnin' around the city we was in -- Nairobi, Kenya, and a voice popped into my head. And it said, Look around, Rich. What do you see?" And I said, 'I see all colors of people doin' everything.' And the voice said, "Do you see any niggers?" And I said no. And it said, "Y'know why? 'Cause there aren't any."

More applause and agreement.

RICHARD

And suddenly it hit me like a shot, man. I started crying and shit, I thought, 'Yeah, I been here three weeks and I haven't even said it. I haven't even thought it. Not once.' And it made me say, Oh my God, I've been wrong. I got to regroup my shit. I said, I ain't never gonna call another black man nigga. No one should. Not me, not you. Not nobody. 'Cause we never was no niggas. That's a word that was used to describe our own wretchedness. And all we do is perpetuate it now, 'cause that word is dead. Dead to me, anyway.

Several black audience members look at each, uncomfortably.

EXT. COMEDY STORE - LATER

Richard walks out, arm around Jennifer with Rashon in tow. They head toward their car. A crowd of mostly black MEN & WOMEN notice him. Call out.

BLACK FOLKS

Yo, Rich. What's with this "don't say nigga" shit? Why you gotta talk down to a brotha? You think you better than us now?

Richard stops. He and Jennifer walk to them.

RICHARD

I ain't better than nobody, and I ain't talkin' down to nobody. I'm just talkin' 'bout I had my own epiphany. That we degrade ourselves by perpetuating that ugliness. You dig? Y'all have a good night now.

BLACK MAN

Ugliness. You think niggas is ugly now?

RICHARD

Tha's not what I said. Don't be twistin' my words all up, man.

BLACK MAN #2

Whatchoo mean 'epiphany', nigga? First you shove this white bitch down our throats, now you talkin' white. We been witcha from the beginning, black. What happened to you, man?

For the first time, Richard's attitude turns.

RICHARD

First of all, I ain't owe none 'a y'all shit. And second, don't be callin' my lady no bitch, man.

BLACK WOMAN

Black woman ain't good enough for a brother with cash.

BLACK MAN #2

You s'posed to be the voice of the revolution, nigga.

RICHARD

I ain't nobody's voice but my own. And I ain't no nigga, jack, so go on with that.

BLACK MAN

Nigga, nigga, nigga, nigga.

RASHON

C'mon, Rich.

Richard and Jennifer turn to go. Someone in the crowd SPITS IN JENNIFER'S FACE. Richard turns and throws a punch. Rashon gets into it. Suddenly, it's a melee.

INT. RICHARD'S OFFICE - DAY

Richard drinks and does lines while Paul, Prophet and David Franklin argue their case. Paul throws a JET MAGAZINE with Richard and Jennifer on the cover on the table.

PAUL

Whatchoo expect? You put her in the movie, cover of Jet, talk about her on Barbara Walters. Your own people gonna have something to say.

DAVID

And on top of it, this whole renunciation of the word nigga --

PAUL

That shit was hard won, man.

RICHARD

Ain't no different than when Malcolm came home from Medina sayin' we was all the same.

PROPHET

Yeah, and they assassinated the brother for it.

Richard ignores them, walks to the window and peers out.

PROPHET

Niggas think you gone soft, man.
Turned your back on your own
people. Tha's the word on the
street.

DAVID

Ask yourself, you lose your core
audience, what's it all been for?

RICHARD

Fuck 'em. I gave those nig --
those motherfuckers everything.
All they know how to do is take. I
ain't doin' nobody no favors
pointin' out people's differences.
And I ain't gonna do it no more no
matter what they say.

He stares out the window, past the gate. Focuses on a CAR
parked across the street.

RICHARD

Prophet, c'mere, man. See that car?

They all crowd around the window, look out at the car.

RICHARD

That shit was sitting there when
you rolled up an hour ago. Three
guys was in there peakin' through
the gate, same as now.

PROPHET

Prob'ly just cops. Maybe fans.

DAVID

Or vice.

PAUL

Vice? In a Cadillac?

EXT. DRIVEWAY - SAME

Richard and his crew walk down the driveway towards the gate.
Yell toward the car across the street. Three TOUGHS sit
there, watching them stride down.

RICHARD

Hey, can I help you?

Suddenly, the car starts up, screeches into a U-turn, the passenger side window rolls down, and one of the Toughs points a gun at the gate.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Richard and his cronies all scatter, dodging shots.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

Two COPS interrogate Paul, David and Prophet. Richard stands close by, but he looks dazed, troubled. Jennifer watches him from the entrance to the house, warily. He seems too distant to approach.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Richard drives through Los Angeles wearing a determined expression.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Richard walks through the gardens, past apartments. He's intense, after something. He stops at a door, knocks. Waits. No answer. Starts banging. Over and over.

RICHARD

Dirty...

Finally, Dirty Dick comes to the door.

DIRTY DICK

Damn, nigga, where's the fire?

RICHARD

Whatchoo got for me?

INT. DIRTY DICK'S APARTMENT - SAME

Richard watches, mesmerized, as Dirty goes through the RITUAL OF PREPARING COCAINE TO FREEBASE.

DIRTY DICK

Freebase, man.

RICHARD

What's the difference? S'all cocaine, ain't it?

DIRTY DICK

You smoke this? Be like the best friend you never had. Won't judge your shit. Or come and go like bitches or the fans. You give it time and attention, shit'll give you what you need one hundred percent 'a the time. Who else can you honestly say that about? When I'm on the pipe, all the noise goes up in smoke, and I see God, nigga. Motherfucking God.

Dirty finishes his process with a SOLID ROCK OF COCAINE. Holds it up for Richard's inspection.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. DIRTY DICK'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Richard holds a GLASS PIPE TO HIS MOUTH. Inhales as Dirty lights the bottom of it. The sensation is immediate. The look in his eyes, nirvana.

CLOSE on THE LIGHTER as it heats the bottom of the pipe. The SOUND OF BURNING, CRACKING GLASS takes us to --

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - DAY

The BED IS ON FIRE -- truly ablaze. Richard stands, eyes glazed over, a virtual zombie, staring at the dancing flames.

Jennifer and Rashon rush into the room.

RICHARDS POV - Jennifer is screaming something, but he can't hear it. Watches them run around in mad silence. Rashon grabs the burning blanket and pulls it out of the room. Richard snaps out of his haze.

RICHARD

I don't know what happened. The rum... on the cotton tip must've dropped on the blanket, and...
(looks up at her)
I'm sorry, Jenny...

She touches his face and stares into his eyes. The sound of her words go in and out like whispers.

JENNIFER
... gotta watch you... can't let
you hurt yourself...

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jennifer watches transfixed as Richard goes painstakingly through the RITUAL OF PREPARING -- it's hypnotic. Finally, he holds the pipe up to her lips, lights the bottom. The look on her face... pure ecstasy.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - DAY & NIGHT

Richard and Jennifer wander around the house like zombies. Have STRANGE, FRIGHTENING VISIONS as the house literally changes before our eyes -- growing darker, spookier as the FREEBASING SPIRALS OUT OF CONTROL.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Richard sits by the door as Jennifer smokes. HE HEARS VOICES WHISPERING FROM THE OTHER SIDE. Looks alarmed.

RICHARD
Jenny, do you hear 'em? They're in
cahoots.

INT. BANK - DAY

Richard stands still with great difficulty as the BANK MANAGER examines his slip.

BANK MANAGER
This is an unusually large
withdrawal, Mr. Pryor. Are you
sure you don't want to --?

RICHARD
I don't know who got to you, but
gimme my muh-fuckin' money, man.

EXT. ESTATE - BACKYARD - DAY

QUICK CUTS as Richard wanders through the Orange Groves, looking over his shoulder in paranoia. Digs numerous holes around the grounds. Buries stacks of cash.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Jennifer awakens with a start. Turns and sees Richard asleep on the carpet. They're both drawn, gaunt and sickly looking. Like *Night of the Living Dead*. She props herself up with difficulty, heads into the --

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Looks at herself in the mirror. Examines the dark circles under her eyes, burns on her lips, sores around her mouth. Starts to whimper.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Richard awakens, his eyes taking a few seconds to focus. He sees Jennifer crouched over him. She's composed now. Gaunt and sickly-looking, but dressed and determined.

JENNIFER

We're dying here.

He focuses on the PIPE on the table behind her. Gets up, heads for it.

Richard jiggles the pipe. Some rock left inside. Puts it to his lips and lights it. She goes over to him, pulls it away from his lips, tries to pry it from his hands.

JENNIFER

We have to stop this.

The pipe falls to the floor. In a fury, Richard throws her across the room, violently. Screams.

RICHARD

Bitch, you out your mind? Don't never grab hold 'a me when I'm with my pipe. I'll kill you.

She looks at him as if seeing him for the first time. He grabs up the pipe, lights it, and gets high again.

JENNIFER

Baby, I can't do this anymore. Come with me. We'll get clean together.

He sits at the edge of the bed in silent contemplation.

JENNIFER

Richard... ? Talk to me.

RICHARD

You too, huh? It's everyone now.
When did you get that license plate
on your car?

JENNIFER

Richard, don't do this.

Richard finally stares up at her. The look is frightening.

RICHARD

Was it when I went to the bank that
time? I can't keep an eye on you
every second, Jenny Lee. Who've
you been talking to?

Jennifer stares into his eyes. Nothing but madness there.
She bolts for the door, but he's faster. Knocks the doorknob
over to get to it; shuts, bolts it, and blocks the way.

RICHARD

I could never be what they wanted
me to be, and now they're out to
get me. They're out there, Jenny
Lee. Waiting. I don't think I
could leave right now if I tried.

JENNIFER

Richard, nobody's out to get you.

RICHARD

My career is over, my life is over.
I'm going down... and you're coming
with me.

(starts toward her)

You are going to die this morning
Jenny Lee, do you hear me? This
morning, you are going to die.

Her vision goes blurry from fear, her knees go weak and she
falls to them. Begs.

JENNIFER

Please don't hurt Jenny Lee. I beg
you, please don't hurt me, Richard.

A smirk comes to his face. Cocks his head, thinking. And in
that instant, Jennifer jumps up and makes a break for it.

He lunges at her. Gets her by the throat. Starts choking her. His nails dig into her skin. Blood is drawn.

He moves her to the bed, not letting go of her throat. Sits her down, looks at himself in the MIRROR behind the bed.

RICHARD

If you move, I'll break your neck.

He stares at himself. Loosens his grip a bit.

RICHARD

This is the only way we can ever really be together in peace.

Jennifer holds on to the cross around her neck. Starts choking out words with difficulty. To save her life.

JENNIFER

It's not true, Richard. I love you. We love each other and we're going to be happy. All the answers we need to be together in peace will come in time. We'll have babies together and live a nice, long life. As long as we love each other and don't hurt each other we'll find a way to make sense of it all. We'll find a way out of this. Believe in me, trust in me, like I trust in you.

Richard looks up at the MIRROR behind the bed. Stares into his reflection with shock. It's monstrous.

Looks back down at Jennifer and CHANGES IN AN INSTANT. Loosens his grip. Lets go. He sits up and slumps over, defeated, exhausted as Jennifer tries to catch her breath.

RICHARD

Get out.

Jennifer stands.

JENNIFER

Please. You need to be somewhere safe where you can get real help.

RICHARD

(defeated whisper)

I've made up my mind, Jenny. I know what I have to do. I've brought shame to my family.

(MORE)

RICHARD (cont'd)
I've hurt them all badly. They're
after me now. They're coming to
get me.

JENNIFER
No one's after you, baby. It's the
pipe.

RICHARD
I know what I have to do. You
better leave or you're gonna get
hurt, too.

Richard looks up at her and she starts backing away towards
the door.

JENNIFER
You're talking about hurting
yourself, aren't you?

RICHARD
You better go, Jenny or you'll
be... sorry...

Jennifer backs toward the door, crying now.

JENNIFER
Richard, please --

RICHARD
GET OOOOOOUUUUUUUUUUT!

He stands. She runs.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Jennifer runs in to where Aunt Dee and Rashon are sitting.
She hysterical.

JENNIFER
Richard's gonna hurt himself. He's
serious this time.

They look up at her raw neck, incredulous. They start
laughing. She can't believe it.

RASHON
He ain't gonna hurt hisself.

AUNT DEE
Honey, when you gonna learn? You
just ain't wanted around here.

Their laughter echoes as Jennifer backs out of the kitchen in disbelief.

EXT. ESTATE - SAME

Jennifer runs out to her car in tears. Stops at the driver side door and looks up at his room. He's staring down at her.

She shakes her head 'No', but he pulls the curtain closed. It's too late, and she knows it. She looks around. There's nothing left for her to do.

JENNIFER

... I'm sorry ... I tried...

She gets in her car, drives off in tears.

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Richard walks, smokes base and cries among all the drug paraphernalia. Mutters to himself and paws at the visions all around him only he can see.

RICHARD

... yes? ... what do you want me to... ?

A look of blissful understanding washes over his face.

RICHARD

... might be... you got to... burn down the old shit... before you can build the new...

He walks blissfully over to the table. Grabs a BOTTLE OF COGNAC and POURS IT ALL OVER HIMSELF. Picks up a lighter.

Suddenly, a knock on the door. Rashon opens it.

RASHON

Hey, man, do you know where the --?

Notices Richard is drenched and holding the lighter.

RICHARD

Come on in. Don't be afraid.

RASHON

(realizes)

Oh God, no --

Richard flicks the lighter and GOES UP IN A BALL OF FLAMES.
Starts screaming.

Aunt Dee and his COUSIN comes in as Richard runs around the room. Chaos.

AUNT DEE
... the blanket... smother him...

Rashon tries to pull the blanket off the bed. They all dive out of Richard's way as he runs ablaze past them and goes CRASHING THROUGH THE WINDOW, shattering the glass and falling to the grass below.

Still on fire, he gets up, runs out the gate, and on to the --

EXT. STREET - SAME

-- runs up the block on fire. Skin bubbling and melting, as curious PASSERS-BY gape at him in horror through their car windows.

He turns on to Hayvenhurst a MAIN THOROUGHFARE, packed with cars and pedestrians.

Aunt Dee, Rashon and various others chase him on foot. A POLICE CAR finally cuts him off. The COPS jump out and SMOTHER HIM WITH BLANKETS.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Smoldering, Richard is loaded into the back of an AMBULANCE. It doesn't look good. Aunt Dee stands by as the ambulance doors close.

SMASH CUT TO:

CHANNELS CHANGING -- NEWS FOOTAGE TO NEWS FOOTAGE -- ANCHORS ON ALL THE MAJOR NETWORKS REPORT ON THE INCIDENT --

INTERCUT W/ NEWSPAPER HEADLINES FURTHER SENSATIONALIZING IT --

ONE LAS CHANNEL CHANGE BRINGS US TO --

EXT. RICHARD'S ESTATE - BACKYARD - DAY

A CAMERA MONITOR on which Barbara Walters interviews a scarred and seemingly humbled Richard in chairs facing the Orange Groves.

Cameras and CREW watch the live interview progress.

BARBARA

Richard, how did it happen?

RICHARD

Me and my partner had been drinkin' this Jamaican rum called Overproof, and it spilled, and he went to get a towel in the bathroom to wipe it up and I lit a cigarette, and the next thing I know I'm on fire.

INT. JENNIFER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jennifer watches the interview in a dark room. Smiles.

JENNIFER

Liar.

BARBARA (T.V)

Were you on drugs?

RICHARD (T.V)

No. I do drugs, but I wasn't on drugs when this happened...

JENNIFER

Liar, liar, pants on fire.

BARBARA (T.V)

Does this kind of thing change you? What does it do to your head?

RICHARD (T.V)

I really feel, I don't go to church or nothin', but I feel born again. I feel like God has given me a second chance at life. And I'm grateful for the fire because I believe that in another three months I would've been dead.

Jennifer nods her agreement at the screen.

BARBARA (T.V)

Why?

RICHARD (T.V)

'Cause I was just goin' down. Inside, y'know. Depression.

(MORE)

RICHARD (T.V) (cont'd)
I just think I would've been dead
or in an institution.

BARBARA (T.V)
I understand that thousands of
people all over the country sent
flowers, sent notes, sent letters.

At this, Richard goes deep inside himself. Speaks slowly,
truly. From the heart.

RICHARD
I got five foot tall boxes of
letters, 'bout four of 'em, in my
house. And it overwhelms me to
think about how nice people can...

Richard stops. The tears are starting to flow. Real tears.

RICHARD
... that so many people love me.
And that the prayers of the people
sent out for me, the love I felt,
helped me tremendously, 'Cause
sometimes you can be down and think
that nobody cares.
(beat)
I just feel different about...
people.

Jennifer stands close to the screen. Traces his face with
love and longing. Starts crying along with Richard.

RICHARD
And I'd really like to thank
everybody that sent me stuff and
wished me well. 'Cause I'm really
glad to be alive. And I mean that.

FADE TO:

INT. MOBILE TRAILER - NIGHT

Richard sits in the lushly appointed trailer as Jennifer dabs
makeup along his scarred neck with great focus. Richard
stares at himself in the mirror. Mouths words to himself,
silently, preparing.

INT. MOBILE TRAILER - LATER

Jennifer buttons Richard shirt, hiding deformed skin beneath
a bright red suit.

EXT. PALLADIUM PARKING LOT - SAME

Richard and Jennifer walk out of the trailer to innumerable CREW and HANGERS-ON.

Super: Hollywood Palladium, 1981

He holds Jennifer close and makes his way through the rabble. They clamor around him, but he hears nothing. He's lost in his head. Focused. Concentrated. Nervous.

INT. PALLADIUM - BACKSTAGE - SAME

Richard stands with Jennifer backstage. He's shaky. Stares at the crowd from the wings. Turns to her.

RICHARD

What if I ain't funny no more?

JENNIFER

They all love you, Richard. Just let them in.

INT. PALLADIUM - STAGE - SAME

Richard walks out to THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE from the packed house. He sweats profusely. The lights in his eyes blind him. The crowd appears to him as one big amorphous blob.

He grabs the mic. Takes a moment a parades around the stage. Looks out, nervously, then --

RICHARD

You know somethin'? I'm sorry.
I'm wastin' y'all's time. I just
ain't funny no more. I'm...

He drops the mic. Exits into the --

INT. WINGS - SAME

Passes Jennifer and the shocked crew on his way to the exit.

RICHARD

I wanna go home.

JENNIFER

Richard, look at me.

He snaps out of it, looks at her. Allows himself to be led to the edge of the wings. Jennifer points out at the audience, at the stage, at the mic.

JENNIFER

Look around.
(beat)
You are home.

Richard stares at all of these things. Focuses on the audience for the first time. Notices all the colors of the rainbow His dream under one roof.

He turns and makes a beeline for the exit. She runs after him.

JENNIFER

Think about this.

He exits with determination. She follows him --

EXT. PALLADIUM PARKING LOT - SAME

-- into the lot and past the rabble and crew on to the...
SIDEWALK.

JENNIFER

Are we walking home?

He walks to the very front entrance, stops at the FRONT DOORS. Turns to her. Smiles.

RICHARD

Like you said, Jenny... I am home.
(off her smile)
Have 'em do somethin' for me... ?

INT. PALLADIUM - MAIN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The anxious crowd murmurs to one another in confusion. Suddenly a VOICE over the loudspeaker...

VOICE

Ladies and gentlemen, live on the
Sunset Strip... Richard Pryor...

A SPOTLIGHT hits the BACK OF THE THEATER illuminating RICHARD AS HE STARTS THROUGH HIS CROWD OF FANS TOWARD THE STAGE.

He allows himself to be swallowed, shaking hands and greeting them all as he goes. Basks in the love. Appreciative.

He hops on stage and STRUTS ABOUT PROUDLY. A look of newness, confidence. Rebirth.

Jennifer watches with pride and delight from the wings as Richard allows the adoring fans to bathe him in cheers.

And there in the back... is MAMA. Nodding and smiling proudly at what her boy has accomplished. He allows himself her approval with a momentary look only Jennifer notices.

And in a flash he refocuses on the crowd with renewed pride -- STARTS HIS ACT. QUICK CUTS OF RICHARD'S STAND-UP. TALKS ABOUT AFRICA -- RELATIONSHIPS -- THE FIRE --

OFF WILD AUDIENCE LAUGHTER --

CUT TO:

INT. RICHARD'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - 2005 - NIGHT

-- where the older Richard watches his younger self in the LIVE ON THE SUNSET STRIP DVD.

His head whips back, mouth drops, Air escapes. Jennifer sits next to him and laughs, delighting in his joy.

INT. RICHARD'S BEDROOM - LATER

Richard lies in bed as Carmen and the other Nurse prep him for his feeding procedure, hook up the tube, etc. Jennifer sits by him, stroking his hand.

JENNIFER

I'll be back before you wake-up.

Okay, Richard? I'll be here.

Air escapes from deep inside of him. Sounds forming. He's desperately trying to speak.

She grips his hand. Pulls closer in anticipation. But the sound stops. Visibly deflated, she smiles anyway. For him.

JENNIFER

It's okay... you don't have to --

Suddenly, and with the greatest difficulty --

RICHARD

... ahhhhhhhyeeeeees...

She pulls close again.

RICHARD
Ahhhhhhhyeee..., loooooovvvvve...

Her eyes are welling up. Long pause, a rush of air escapes from his mouth, and then --

RICHARD
... yaaaaawwwwww.

Stillness. Jennifer shakes.

JENNIFER
I love you, too, baby. So much.

Falling apart, she composes herself. Kisses him.

JENNIFER
I'll be back before you know it.

The corners of his lips curl of slightly. The best he can do for a smile. She squeezes his hand and heads for the door.

She stops short. A look comes over her. Hesitant to leave all of a sudden. But why? A premonition? She shakes it off. Exits.

CLOSE ON RICHARD'S FACE

A serenity there. A look of peace. Finality. His eyes slowly close as he thinks back... one last time to --

INT. PALLADIUM -- STAGE - 1981 - NIGHT

Richard stalks the stage. Risen out of the ashes like a phoenix. Glances for a moment at the younger Jennifer in the wings. His strength. Winks.

He's a commanding presence, working the mic and the crowd in this THEATER FULL OF EQUALLY MIXED ETHNICITIES -- INTERACTING WITH HIM AND ONE ANOTHER --

Here to LAUGH AT COMMON TRUTHS and forget their differences... if only for tonight...

... in the House of Pryor.

BLACK.